Athletics

Gunnell 'cheated out of year's top prize'

Jeremy Alexander

SALLY GUNNELL learned last week that she was the women's 1994 Athlete of the Year. The news reached the British athlete on the eve of the 1995 awards in Monte Carlo when Christopher Winner, the former International Amateur Athletic Federation spokesman, claimed that last year's votes were rigged.

Winner told USA Today that Gunnell, who in 1994 held the Olympic, world, European and Commonwealth titles simultaneously, had topped the women's poll but was replaced by the American heptathlete Jackie Joyner-Kersee when the IAAF learned that Gunnell would not be attending the gala dinner at which the awards were announced. Colin Jackson, Winner claims, was similarly demoted from second to fourth.

The glittering black-tie ball that accompanies the ceremony is televised to 74 countries and Winner says the IAAF president Primo Nebiolo was keen to ensure the top three athletes in the men's and women's polls attend.

Gunnell won the award in 1993 and Winner says that, when he told Nebiolo she had won again, the president said: "Oh no, not the Englishwoman again." Ten days later, he says, after the poll had closed, he received 30 ballots in an unmarked envelope, all in the same handwriting and all for Joyner-Kersee. Winner says he was ordered to accept them. "I can only express shame for participating in what amounts to gross vote rigging. I should have resigned then," says Winner. He did so in June.

Last Friday, the IAAF "firmly rejected these allegations." Its general secretary Istvan Gyulai said: "There is no explanation for them." He called Winner's charges "childish". Winner says he still has the 30 voting papers.

A later IAAF statement fell short of denial, bearing instead the lofty tone of a man used to riding out charges of cheating. "The IAAF firmly rejects any effort to disturb the celebration of the best athletes of the year and wishes to confirm its appreciation of them and all athletes whose efforts bring life and strength to our sport."

The top three women announced last year were Joyner-Kersee, followed by Irina Privalova and Sonia O'Sullivan. Noureddine Morceli won the men's award, fair and square, ahead of Javier Sotomayor and Sergei Bubka.

● The annus mirabilis of Jonathan Edwards, Britain's triple jump world record holder, brought him double honours at the weekend. First he won the prestigious Athlete of the Year award in Monte Carlo and then was named the BBC Sports Personality for 1995. The women's award at Monte Carlo went to Gwen Torrence of the US.

Football Premiership



Net gain . . . Brazilian star Juninho taps in for his first goal in a Middlesbrough shirt, to round off their 4-1 victory over struggling Manchester City PHOTOGRAPH: RAOUL DIXON

Coventry City 5 Blackburn Rovers 0

Big Ron lost for words

Mark Redding

TEN years ago Ron Atkinson was sitting on top of the league with Manchester United, who had begun the season by winning their first 10 games and going unbeaten in 15. On Saturday he was at the foot of the table with Coventry, whose defence had been leaking goals faster than their attack could keep up.

That Coventry did not just beat the champions but blasted them completely out of the water at Highfield Road said as much for the motivational powers of their manager as for his habit of hurling money at enough swashbuckling tearaways to crew a pirate ship.

"Our positivity overwhelmed them," was how the cock-a-hoop Coventry winger Salako explained it. "We refused to let Blackburn impose their quality on us."

For once Atkinson seemed as dumbfounded as his opposite number Ray Harford. "We defended very, very well, they didn't get too many looks at goal and for us that was a pleasant change," he mumbled.

Atkinson's relief was tempered by the discovery that Whyte — signed on loan from Birmingham and one of his three outstanding centre-backs along with Busst and Rennie — is now due a three-match ban.

City began hesitantly on a skating rink of a pitch but soon realised that Blackburn were unwilling to work hard enough for a first away win this season.

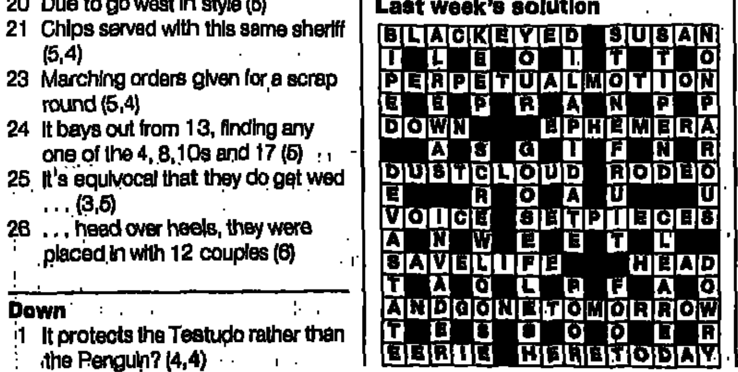
Busst opened the scoring with a powerful header off the underside of the bar five minutes before half-time and when the unmarked Dublin fired a second 20 minutes later Rovers were sinking fast.

Their defence — featuring the £5 million striker Sutton at centre-back — disintegrated as a header from Rennie and shots from Ndlovu and Salako helped lift Coventry above Bolton at the foot of the Premiership.

The most relieved man afterwards was Coventry's chairman Bryan Richardson, who has promised to add to City's £9 million debts to allow Atkinson to spend his way out of trouble.

At least he cut the overdraft. "I had £1 on Busst at 40-1 to score the first goal," the chairman beamed, then added: "most of all I'm pleased for Ron."

Cryptic crossword by Plodge



Across

1 One who lays about did wrong in secret (6)
4 Emend a hundred misprints in 18, 24 (8)
9 Robin sometimes hesitates to leave the game (5)
10 Vet orator's prose to follow the Italian 24 (9)
11 Having taken to the booze with both hands, we came to less than nothing! (5,4)
12 One of the "Two Gentlemen" appearing in "All's Well that Ends Well" (5)
13 The one-time dividend dispensers who covet no praise (12)
17 Throw confetti at us during the 18, 24 (4,3,5)
20 Due to go west in style (5)
21 Chips served with this same sheriff (5,4)
23 Marching orders given for a scrap round (5,4)
24 It bays out from 13, finding any one of the 4, 8, 10s and 17 (5)
25 It's equivocal that they do get wed . . . (3,5)
26 . . . head over heels, they were placed in with 12 couples (6)

Down

1 It protects the Testudo rather than the Penguin? (4,4)
2 Almost nobody joins Lou in diving for the old Spanish coin (8)
3 Settle back on new blue paint (5)
5 In the process of making everything smell of roses, send a dozen to Radio One (13)
6 The shabbiest in the street were subjected to a benefit enquiry (5,4)
7 Retire early to bed without a top blanket? I'll be hanged! (6)
8 Italian 24 took place in the hotel lobby (6)
10 Baltazer's among those who caught a bad cold. Note the 18, 24 (3,5,5)
14 The Spaniard, on being detained, was made to endure a long stretch (9)
15 The missile must be pointed in order to be piercing (8)
16 Let the abutments of one's resting places be dapple shaded! (8)
18 The creator of 4, 10 and 17 was discovered at an auction in Australia (6)
19 Lothario, the Italian go-go dancer (6)
22 "Wet back" is a new term (5)

Last week's solution

B	L	A	C	K	E	Y	E	D		S	U	S	A	N
I		L		E		O		I		T		T		O
P	E	R	P	E	T	U	A	L	M	O	T	I	O	N
E		E		P		R		A		N		P		P
D	O	W	N				E	P	H	E	M	E	R	A
		A		S		G		I		F		N		R
D	U	S	T	C	L	O	U	D		R	O	D	E	O
E				R		O		A		U				U
V	O	I	C	E		S	E	T	P	I	E	C	E	S
A		N		W		E		E		T		L		
S	A	V	E	L	I	F	E				H	E	A	D
T		A		O		L		R		F		A		O
A	N	D	G	O	N	E	T	O	M	O	R	R	O	W
T		E		S			S		O		O		E	R
E	E	R	I	E		H	E	R	E	T	O	D	A	Y

Results and leading positions

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP: Bolton 0, Liverpool 1; Chelsea 1, Newcastle Utd 0; Coventry 5, Blackburn 0; Leeds 1, Wimbledon 1; Man Utd 2, Sheff Wed 2; Middlesbrough 4, Man C 1; Nottm Forest 1, Aston Villa 1; Southampton 0, Arsenal 0; Tottenham 1, QPR 0. **Leading Positions:** 1, Newcastle Utd (17-39); 2, Man Utd (17-35); 3, Arsenal (17-30).

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE: First Division: Birmingham 1, Watford 0; Charlton 0, Ipswich 2; C Palace 2, Oldham 2; Derby 4, Barnsley 1; Luton 2, Wolverhampton 3; Norwich 2, Grimsby 2; Port Vale 3, Reading 2; Sheff Utd 0, Huddersfield 2; Southend 2, Leicester 1; Sunderland 6, Millwall 0; Tranmere 1, Portsmouth 2; West Brom 0, Stoke 1. **Leading Positions:** 1, Sunderland (20-37); 2, Derby (21-34); 3, Norwich (21-34)

Second Division: Bradford C 2, Peterborough 1; Brentford 0, Bristol Rvrs 0; Brighton 2, Bournemouth 0; Bristol C 0, Notts Co 2; Burnley 2, Chesterfield 2; Crewe 1, Blackpool 2; Hull 2, Carlisle 5; Oxford Utd 5, Swansea 1; Rotherham 0, Swindon 2; Stockport 0, Shrewsbury 2; Walsall 2, York 0; Wrexham 1, Wycombe 0. **Leading Positions:** 1, Swindon (19-41); 2, Notts County (19-38); 3, Crewe (19-37).

Third Division: Barnet 0, Bury 0; Cambridge Utd 2, Lincoln 1; Cardiff 2, Hartlepool 0; Hereford 1, Colchester 1; Leyton Orient 0, Exeter 3; Northampton 1, Torquay 1; Plymouth 3, Wigan 1; Preston 1, Fulham 1; Rochdale 1, Doncaster 0; Scarborough 1, Darlington 2; Scunthorpe 1, Mansfield 1. **Leading Positions:** 1, Chester (18-37); 2, Preston (19-36); 3, Gillingham (18-36).

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE: Premier Division: Aberdeen 1, Motherwell 0; Hibernian 0, Celtic 4; Kilmarnock 4, Falkirk 0; Raith 1, Hearts 1; Rangers 1, Partick 0. **Leading Positions:** 1, Rangers (17-42); 2, Celtic (17-38); 3, Hibernian (17-28).

First Division: Dumbarton 0, St Mirren 0; Dundee 2, Dunfermline 4; Hamilton 2, Greenock Morton 3; St Johnstone 0, Dundee Utd 0. **Leading Positions:** 1, Dunfermline (17-34); 2, Greenock Morton (17-33); 3, Dundee Utd (17-31).

Third Division: Brechin 4, East Stirling 1. **Leading Positions:** 1, Livingston (16-34); 2, Brechin (17-29); 3, Ross County (16-27).

TENNENTS SCOTTISH CUP: First Round: Stranraer 0, Livingston 3.

 Published by Guardian Publications Ltd., 164 Deansgate, Manchester, M60 2RR, and printed by WCP Commercial Printing, Leek. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and mailing offices. Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office.

The **Guardian** Weekly

Vol 153, No 26
Week ending December 24, 1995

The Washington Post · Le Monde

Communists stage Russian comeback

David Hearst and James Meek in Moscow

GENNADY ZYUGANOV, the leader of Russia's victorious Communists, set his sights on the presidency held by Boris Yeltsin, after his party's impressive showing in Sunday's general election.

Mr Zyuganov said President Yeltsin and his prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, had no right to carry out their old policies after receiving what amounted to a popular vote of no confidence. Mr Yeltsin, if he is fit to run, faces a tough re-election battle next June.

The latest results on Tuesday from Sunday's parliamentary poll put the Communist Party on about 22 per cent — twice that of the nearest rival, Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. The prime minister's party, Our Home is Russia, was trailing in third place with under 10 per cent.

Eschewing triumphalism, Mr Zyuganov appealed to other parties to join a "national patriotic coalition" which could include the leftwing liberal Yabloko and the ultra-nationalist LDPR.

Neither government nor presidential sources initially appeared alarmed by the swing to the opposition. Mr Chernomyrdin said: "The Communist Party has already been operating for 97 years in Russia and got about 20 per cent of the votes. Our Home has been working only four or five months and we immediately got almost 10 per cent."

The government hopes to weaken the Communist success by gaining seats in the constituency first-past-the-post contests.

The Yabloko leader, Grigory Yavlinsky, whose 8 per cent vote gives liberals a perilous foothold in the Duma, warned of confrontation. He said: "If Yeltsin and his government do not change their economic course and stop the war in Chechenia . . . the results of the presidential elections next June are clear — the Communists or nationalists would come to power."

Mr Yavlinsky has hinted at a willingness to vote with the Communists on key issues such as a resolution of the Chechen conflict.

The first key cabinet change could come soon, if the foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, decides to take up the seat he has won in Murmansk. New rules forbid sitting deputies from serving as ministers.

If the scale of the Communist success was widely predicted, the figures as a whole provided many surprises. The biggest shock was the strong performance by Mr Zhirinovsky's LDPR. Its preliminary 11 per cent was well below the 23 per cent of 1993, but was still far higher than the pundits had predicted.

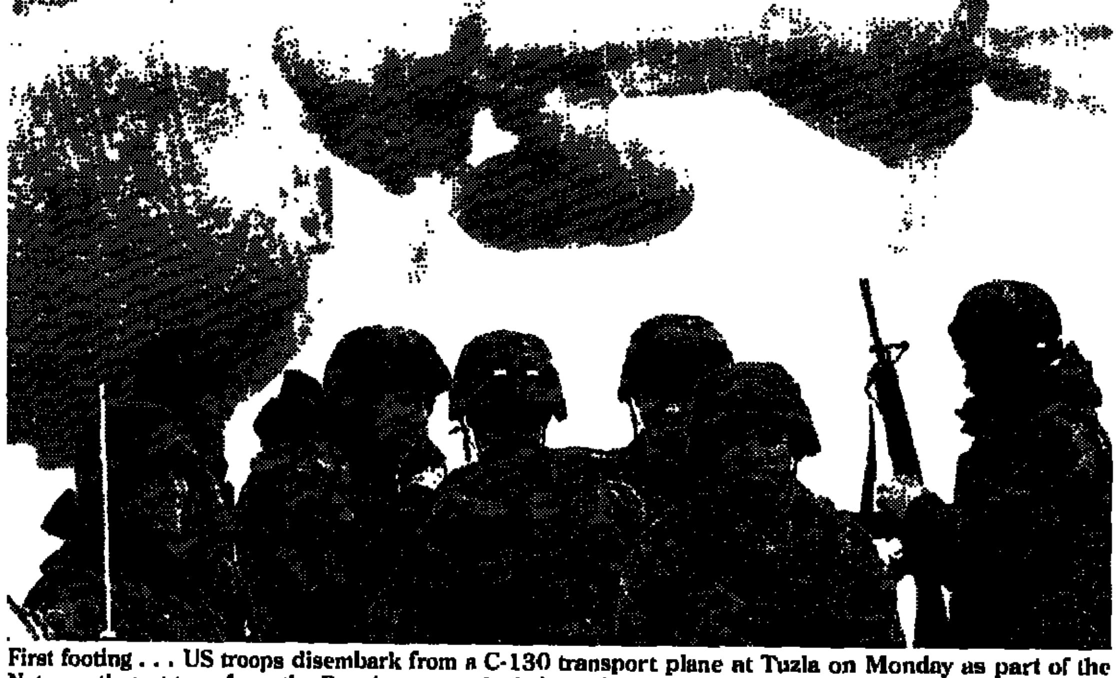
Many had written it off as a one-shot outfit which would be marginalised once two years as head of the biggest party in the Duma had exposed Mr Zhirinovsky as a clown and a menace. It now appears that Mr Zhirinovsky, far from being the party's great liability, is its greatest asset — the only truly professional politician in the Duma.

Of 43 parties participating, only four seemed certain to breach the 5 per cent barrier to gain a share of the Duma's 225 proportional representation seats.

Comment, page 8







First footing . . . US troops disembark from a C-130 transport plane at Tuzla on Monday as part of the Nato contingent to enforce the Bosnian peace deal signed in Paris last week PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN GAPS

Peace revives urge for revenge

Dean Murphy in Pale

THE MOST savage conflict in Europe since the defeat of Nazi Germany is officially over, but there is little soul-searching on the silent Balkan battlefield.

An estimated 250,000 people have been killed and more than 3 million have fled their homes in three republics of former Yugoslavia during 52 months of war. There is barely a family that has not lost a friend or loved one, or witnessed the cruelty of neighbour turned against neighbour.

But from the Pale headquarters of the rebel Bosnian Serbs in the mountains above Sarajevo to the promenades of the Croatian capital Zagreb, quiet reflection on the war's moral lessons is rare.

"The Serbs have had a tough history. They are not guilty at all," said Branka, aged 37, a Bosnian Serb who sells household goods at the market in Pale. "The blame belongs to the Muslims and Croats."

Who should answer for the war's mass executions, the rapes, the wholesale burning of villages and the expulsion of neighbours whose only crime was being Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox or Muslim? Should the Bosnian Serbs shoulder a hefty portion of the blame?

"Nine of my relatives were burned alive by Muslims in their house in 1993, and only one of them survived," Branka said. "Who has the right to say who committed atrocities? America, just because it is so powerful?"

Ask about guilt and responsibility in Croatia, in Muslim-led Bosnia-Herzegovina, or in Serbia, and the response is not very different: only the name of the culprit — Serb, Croat or Muslim — changes.

In a war ostensibly fought across religious divides, many people in the crumbled remnants of what was Yugoslavia have not contemplated the personal moral dimensions of the bloodshed, nor do they wish to.

Some say it is too early for such appraisals; others that such issues are irrelevant on a centuries-old battlefield where current enmities follow a pattern of unresolved conflicts.

The sort of soul-searching that experts say is essential to healing and reconciliation has been quashed by finger-pointing, hatred and denial. Nowhere in the Balkans has the cry of moral indignation after the second world war — "Never Again!" — found an echo.

"No one is even asking these questions," said Vesna Pesic, a sociologist and leader of the Civic Alliance of Serbia, an opposition party which was against the war from the start.

"People do not feel responsibility

continued on page 4

Comment, page 8
Washington Post, page 12

Peres ready to give up Golan Heights

Derek Brown in Jerusalem and AP

THE Israeli prime minister, Shimon Peres, plans to announce Israel's recognition of Syrian sovereignty over the Golan Heights if the new round of peace talks between the two countries next week goes well, an Israeli newspaper reported.

The daily Maariv said Mr Peres will present the Knesset (parliament) with an announcement of intent to withdraw from the Golan if the talks, at an undisclosed venue near Washington on December 27, succeed.

Yossi Beilin, Mr Peres's top adviser, said that Israel was aiming for a framework peace agreement with Syria, which the government might submit to the Israeli people in early elections. "We are committed to asking the people before we take a final decision," he said.

After years of stuttering attempts to bring the Middle East's most implacable enemies to the negotiating table, US diplomatic pressure paid off with a weekend announcement that the talks would resume and that both sides had significantly softened their positions.

"There is great hope that the two parties, which have shown flexibility now, can conclude [an agreement] as early as possible," Warren Christopher, the United States secretary of state, said in Cairo on Sunday.

The key factor in the new optimism is, ironically, the assassination last month of Yitzhak Rabin, the architect of the peace deals with the Palestinians and Jordan. In the aftermath of the killing, Israeli public opinion has swung strongly behind the government's peace policies.

Rightwing parties have predictably condemned the latest moves towards peace with Syria, claiming that Mr Peres has already signalled willingness to give up the Golan Heights, captured in 1967.

● Christmas may come early for the Palestinians of Bethlehem. As part of the expanding Palestinian self-rule, Israeli troops were expected to pull out on Thursday.

Shin Bet fall-out, page 4

Because of distribution problems over the holiday season, we are publishing next week's issue with this one.

Austria	AS30	Malta	45c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 3.60	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 400	Sweden	SK 18
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF 3.30

Gene research safe with much to offer humanity

GEORGE MONBIOT ("Beware outbreak of mad scientist disease", December 10) gives a very slanted view of the molecular biology science community as blinkered back-room researchers slaving for industrial world domination with no view of "the big picture" — how their research will affect the future of the world. For the majority of scientists this is totally wrong.

First, he bestows on us a higher moral purpose and duty than normal human beings and implies we are irresponsible. Molecular biologists have a history of being responsible — when the technology was developed to genetically engineer organisms they regulated both themselves and the technology to protect the environment. Of course all knowledge can be abused — nuclear weapons and nuclear power are a classic example — but to my knowledge there have been no biological Chernobyls or Bhopals.

Knowledge carries a heavy responsibility with it — but to restrict knowledge is both difficult and unwise. Abuse of such knowledge is often the choice of industrialists and politicians, not merely scientists.

Why is it surprising that where the funding goes to determines what research is done? The era of aristocratic scientists experimenting in their country houses has gone. Research does cost money and it is part of the duty of a government to fund it — knowledge is vital to preserve the health and future of humanity. Government and private charitable institutions provide the money that I need to do research. This is not unusual — the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (London) is a shining example of pure research unfettered by industry's demands.

Neither is it surprising that many of the funded labs are those in currently popular fields because, like all professions, science has its fashions. Yet these trends in science are created by the need for knowledge, such as with Aids and cystic fibrosis research, not by industrialists or the drive for financial profit.

As for stating "many researchers could be fairly described as idiot savants", this is no more true than stating that many journalists could be fairly described as under-informed bigots. Perhaps it is fortunate that you cannot contract "mad journalists disease" by just reading the Guardian.
(Dr) Neil Emans,
San Francisco, California, USA

GEORGE MONBIOT claims that gene splicing "is more hazardous than we have been led to believe" and quotes no facts to support this. There are none. No deaths and no diseases have been reported as a result of bio-engineered organisms from 1970 to the present day.

"Gene manipulation offers more potential problems than solutions," he writes. Cheap insulin, growth hormone without added Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease factor, fast and accurate tests for pregnancy, HIV, hepatitis A and B, colon cancer, cheaper and cleaner enzyme-based industrial processes, engineered bacteria that clean up oil slicks, heavy metal seepage, toxic wastes — all these can be weighed against the nebulous or non-existent problems Monbiot seems so eager to bring up.

Isaac Asimov referred to an unreasoning fear and hatred of intelligent machines as "the Frankenstein complex". Today the Frankenstein complex is exhibited by ill-informed and unreasoning individuals such as George Monbiot against a technology which, alone in the world, has had no dangerous side effects.
Alexander Campbell,
Edinburgh

SINCE George Monbiot uses our research to epitomise his hatred of genetic engineering and science, we would like to correct him on errors of fact. Luminous plants were constructed in 1991 for reasons closely connected with a need for knowledge of environmental stress effects on crop growth. But their primary agricultural use, as we described it, will be to reduce the necessity for much agrochemical application to crops. Maybe Monbiot would regard that as evil; but we do not believe the public will complain that there are fewer chemicals in their food supply and drinking water.
Anthony Trewavas, Marc Knight,
University of Edinburgh

MANY agricultural scientists share George Monbiot's scepticism of the future of gene technology in world food production, although for entirely different reasons. Apart from producing some novelties, gene technology does not seem likely to offer much of practical value to food production, which will continue to rely on conventional technologies such as plant breeding and integrated pest management.

Monbiot's dismissal as simplistic nonsense that intensive agriculture is unsustainable is better applied to his own confused views about size of fields. To reduce the present intensity of land use for agriculture would result either in agriculture spilling further into marginal lands, or famine for many people.
Peter Bailey,
Blackwood, South Australia

Accelerating asylum cases

HUGO YOUNG'S windy rhetoric ("Dirty tricks in the race-card game", December 17) shows scant regard for the facts. The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act (1993), far from restricting asylum appeals, extended appeals to all categories of asylum-seeker in the UK.

The new Bill does indeed widen the "without foundation" category. But it is plainly wrong, as the Home Secretary made clear in the House of Commons, to assert that "almost all categories of asylum" will be treated as without foundation. Most applications will not fall within this category.

What the Bill does is to enable accelerated procedures to be applied to claims which do not show a fear of persecution, which are manifestly unfounded, which are manifestly fraudulent, or which are made in order to stave off removal action.

That is entirely justified. Many other western European countries apply similar criteria.

Again, it is simply not true that anyone coming from a designated country of origin will face "an insurmountable presumption that they do not qualify as persecuted". Such cases will be considered individually and substantively on their merits. In the exceptional cases where asylum or exceptional leave is justified, it will be granted.

Hugo Young's slur on the Immigration Appellate Authorities is unworthy. Special adjudicators are, and will remain, judicial post-holders who are entirely independent of the Home Office.

Mr Young reserves his most extravagantly self-righteous language for Nigerian cases. But, once again, he does not address the facts.

Nigerian asylum applications have risen from 615 in 1992 to 4,340 in 1994. Last year, 99 per cent were refused.

It is not simply the Home Office's opinion that the great majority were unfounded. Only five appeals were allowed by the independent adjudicators.

Of course the Government deplores developments in Nigeria such as the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight associates after a flawed trial. But the vast majority of Nigerian asylum claims are from people who clearly have no well-founded fear of persecution.

Like all asylum claims, Nigerian applications must be, and are, considered on the basis of the most up-to-date individually relevant facts, and in the light of the Convention criteria, not in an atmosphere of moral hysteria.
Ann Widdecombe MP,
Minister of State,
Home Office, London

MY FIRM represents asylum seekers. They are among the most vulnerable and weak members of our society. All too often they are traumatised from the horrors of extreme physical and psychological abuse. Many have been tortured in the most inhuman ways imaginable. Many are women and children who have been raped and sexually abused. Many arrive suffering from chronic fatigue.

Asylum seekers do not have a right of access to legal representation. Legal Aid is not available for any appeal against a decision to refuse refugee status. Mistaken deportation can lead to persecution and death. A person suspected of the most heinous crime, such as mass murder, has far better legal rights.

What is the remedy then — funeral expenses?
Martin Howe,
Ealing, London

Women's fight for equal rights

JAMES LEWIS (December 10) asks whether the decision in favour of Susan Edwards, London Underground driver and mother, now means women must have "special treatment for every eventuality that their biology might present".

Clearly the decision has nothing to do with Ms Edwards's biology and everything to do with her child-rearing responsibilities. This answers Mr Lewis's second question: yes, similar concessions should apply to single men with the same responsibilities. Though perhaps if more men did face up to their parental responsibilities there would be fewer women faced with the struggle of Ms Edwards.

Why do I get the feeling that, where men like James Lewis are concerned, women would be wrong whatever they did? In these times of concern about the number of single mothers receiving social security it is surely admirable that Ms Edwards not only devotes herself to raising her child but also fights to stay off welfare.
A J Richards,
Cromwell, Connecticut, USA

Briefly

DURING the seventies and eighties the Nigerian people elected and then re-elected a democratic government. Some Nigerians (including some famous Nigerian authors), who were unhappy with the state of affairs, then began clamouring for the military to take over to clean out the corrupt politicians.

As a result a popularly elected government was overthrown by the people (an exercise carried out also in Uganda and Bangladesh, where a second attempt is now underway). The Nigerian people are now unhappy with the military and are screaming for a democratic government.

The choice seems to be between a somewhat corrupt democracy or a repressive military regime. When will the Nigerians (and others) learn that democracy, with all its imperfections, is preferable to any other system of government?
(Prof) Munawar Karim,
Rochester, New York, USA

I AM astounded — appalled might be a better word — by the following comment of Mr Zia Mahmood in his bridge column (November 19). I quote: "From the opening banquet — eight courses of imperial Chinese cuisine held in the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square — it was clear that no effort would be spared to create a tournament of spectacle and splendour."

Has Mr Mahmood been on another planet in the last few years?
Richard Ballentine,
Orangeville, Ontario, Canada

MAKING speeches is all very well, but actions speak louder than words. Princess Diana must have plenty of spare rooms. She could donate some of them to rehousing homeless youth.

Come on, Di, lead the way. Kensington Palace could be an example to the world: day nursery, rehabilitation, counselling centre, convalescent home. And you wouldn't have to go roaming the streets at night looking for deprived persons to love.
Joseph Hill,
New Mills, Derbyshire

THE BRITISH government is becoming nervous at the news from republican France. It is afraid that this realm of forelock-touching subjects, already mildly infected by notions of liberty, equality and fraternity, will listen to those economists who state that it is not financially necessary to abolish the welfare state.
H T Gosling,
Henbury, Bristol

IS THERE any truth in the rumour that one can contract BSE or CJD by eating alphabet soup?
Doug Meredith,
Manchester

The Guardian Weekly
December 24, 1995 Vol 153 No 26

Annual subscription rates are £47 (United Kingdom); £52 (Europe inc. Eire); £55 USA and Canada; £60 Rest of World.
Letters to the Editor and other editorial correspondence to: The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. Fax: 44-171-242-0985 (UK: 0171-242 0985). e-mail: weekly@guardian.co.uk

US army cell 'sabotaging Haiti policy'

Jonathan Freedland in Washington

HAITIANS are choosing a new president amid reports that a neo-Nazi cell in one of the United States army's élite units has been sabotaging US policy by siding covertly with the enemies of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

It has also emerged that US intelligence helped to create Fraph, the notorious Haitian paramilitary squad, and continued to support it even after US troops restored democracy in Haiti last year. Despite the US arms embargo, pistols, machine-guns, grenades and other weapons were shipped to Fraph from June 1993.

Revelations of an underground in the Special Forces came on the eve of the second democratic presidential election in Haitian history, which took place on Sunday.

Fr Aristide's hand-picked successor, René Préval, is almost certain to win the race. Capitalising on the phenomenal popularity of the president, Mr Préval is expected to defeat all 13 opponents. On Tuesday he led with 82 per cent of the vote in a sample count being conducted by international observers.

The US military authorities released copies of the Resister, a newsletter purporting to be written by the Special Forces Underground, just 48 hours after launching a worldwide inquiry into racist extremism in the army.

That investigation follows the recent murder of a black couple, allegedly by white supremacist soldiers, near Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Army chiefs believe the Resister is published at the base — the second largest military installation in the US.

Adopting the same rhetoric as America's burgeoning rightwing militia movement, the Resister claims that its supporters violated US policy in Haiti by teaching supporters of the ousted military junta how to conceal weapons and identifying allies of Fr Aristide as potential targets for revenge attacks.

The newsletter claimed that the removal of Haiti's military junta, in power since ousting Fr Aristide in 1991, and US intervention in September 1994 were both the plot of "racists" and "tribalists" among black members of Congress.

"The US military has become a slave service for the wealth redistribution schemes of internationalists and gangs of weeping do-gooder mystics," said a recent edition of the Resister, leaked to the New York Times.

Trained in medicine, explosives and engineering, and often fluent in several languages, Special Forces troops are frequently charged with sensitive, semi-political roles. In Haiti they have been involved in overhauling the police and court systems.

"This is very dangerous," said Michael Reynolds, who tracks the Special Forces Underground for the Southern Poverty Law Centre. "They have access to weaponry."

The revelations undermine US boasts of the success of the Haiti mission. Administration officials had been hoping that the election would vindicate Mr Clinton's policy of involvement.

Washington Post, page 12



Rock of rage . . . A woman injured by stone-throwing opponents of President Aristide is given help by bystanders in a suburb of Port-au-Prince
PHOTOGRAPH: BEBETO MATTHEWS

US fears India test could trigger race

Suzanne Goldenberg in New Delhi and Jonathan Freedland in Washington

FEARS that a planned atomic test by India could trigger a nuclear race by the developing world and shatter hopes of a comprehensive test ban treaty were highlighted last week by senior officials in the Clinton administration.

Anxiety that recent tests by France and China have opened a Pandora's Box was heightened by reports in the New York Times that United States spy satellites had recorded suspicious activity at the Pokharan nuclear test site in India's Rajasthan desert — which could indicate a test within months or much sooner. India's last atomic detonation was in 1974.

The Indian government called the reports speculation but stopped short of a full denial. It said the satellite pictures showed army exercises whose "movements have been absurdly misinterpreted".

But a US state department spokesman, Glyn Davies, said: "If there were to be an explosive test by India it would be a dramatic departure from India's own long-standing position against testing. Any such test would be a setback to disarmament efforts internationally — disarmament efforts which India itself has championed."

"We're not sure what they're up to," a senior US source told the New York Times. "If their motive is to get scientific knowledge, it might be months or years before they do the test. If it's for purely political reasons, it could be this weekend."

Washington fears any nuclear activity by New Delhi will trigger a tit-for-tat test by its arch-rival, Pakistan. Both countries have refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Signalling trouble ahead, a Pakistani diplomat described the move as "an ominous development" bound to intensify tension.

The Clinton administration now fears its campaign for a global test ban might, paradoxically, be spurring nuclear powers to test their arsenals before it comes into effect.

"The French have refused to listen to world opinion and the United States is not disarming itself and has not responded to the spirit of the comprehensive test ban treaty or the NPT, therefore there is a kind of unanimity in the country to start nuclear weapons tests before it is closed for all Third World countries," said Dhirendra Sharma, convener of India's National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy.

Hardliners in New Delhi have been pushing for a test in recent months, claiming that without one India risks allowing its armoury to become obsolete.

A weapons test would also be a dramatic way for the beleaguered ruling Congress Party to prove its political strength in the face of attacks from the rightwing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party, the largest opposition faction. The BJP officially supports the "weaponising" of India and has urged New Delhi to spell out its nuclear policy.

Many middle-class Indians agree, seeing nuclear capability as a symbol of New Delhi's status as a world player, and the NPT as a means by which the developed world can exclude newcomers to the nuclear club.

Senior Indian party leaders said they doubted that the government was preparing for a test, describing the New York Times report as a US-inspired leak aimed at ensuring western states retain their advantage in the development of nuclear weapons.

"I think it's a plant by the state department which is engaging in a kind of warning signal," said Jaswant Singh, the deputy parliamentary leader of the BJP, who comes from the area where the tests allegedly are to be conducted.

The Indian external affairs ministry spokesman, Arif Khan, also dismissed the report. Other ministry officials said it was highly speculative. "It's normal to have routine military exercises and troop movements in a border area," one said.

Nuclear-free SE Asia, page 11

Socialists gain in Austria

Ian Traynor in Vienna

CHANCELLOR Franz Vranitzky of Austria was confident of extending his nine-year hold on office this week when his Social Democrat Party surprised the pundits and itself by taking 38.3 per cent of the vote, an increase of three points.

But the far-right demagogue Jörg Haider entrenched himself as the most popular extremist leader in western Europe, maintaining his Freedom Party's support at last year's level of more than 22 per cent.

Gernot Rumpold, Mr Haider's campaign manager, crowed: "A quarter of Austrians support Haider. Our movement will now target 1998" — the next presidential election.

The clear losers in the election, triggered by the collapse of the coalition government in October, were the fringe Greens and Liberal parties and, most of all, the centre-right Austrian People's Party. Its leader, Wolfgang Schuessel, made the poll inevitable by walking out of the coalition. He gambled on replacing Mr Vranitzky as the main force in Austrian politics, but his support remained much the same as last year at 28.3 per cent.

The Social Democrats increased their lead over the People's Party from 7 to 10 per cent, prompting speculation that Mr Schuessel's career as centre-right leader would end less than a year after he took over.

Austria has been ruled by a Social Democrat/People's Party centrist coalition for nine years. But after the election in October last year, the two partners failed to agree on a budget for next year that would make the country fit to join the scheduled single European currency.

Sunday's result could enable Mr Schuessel and Mr Haider to muster a slim majority on the right and push the Social Democrats into opposition for the first time in 25 years. Between them they took 95 of the 183 seats in parliament. But that looks unlikely to happen.

Rwanda expels more aid agencies

Chris McGreal in Johannesburg

RWANDA has expelled another five aid agencies as the government bristles at the criticism of its human rights abuses, the failed promises of assistance after last year's massacre of Tutsis, and international indifference to the continuing military threat from exiled Hutu extremists.

It has ordered 43 agencies to leave this month, accusing them of political bias and inefficiency. But aid workers interpret the expulsions as part of a wider disenchantment with foreign governments and organisations.

The latest expulsions came at the end of a difficult week for the government. A well-known Hutu colonel defected to Zaire, and there were further accusations of ethnic persecution by the Tutsi-dominated army.

Even the announcement by the international tribunal of the first eight indictments for genocide had a mixed reception, because it has taken 18 months, and the arrest of the principal architects of the slaughter is still some way off. They continue to live in comfort in Kenya or Zaire.

To some Tutsis it is further evidence of international indifference to their suffering.

Earlier this month the French medical relief groups Médecins Sans Frontières and Médecins du Monde were among the more prominent agencies told to leave. They may have been expelled because of the government's deep suspicion of all things French since Paris backed the defunct Hutu regime and sent troops into Rwanda toward the end of the civil war.

But the government is also angered by criticism from aid agency and other foreign organisations of its continuing human rights abuses, including revenge killings by Tutsi soldiers and the difficult conditions in prisons overflowing with genocide suspects.

Tutsi officials dismiss such foreign observations as hypocritical and an attempt to assuage consciences for the meagre international effort to halt last year's slaughter of Tutsis.

The government argues that conditions would improve if western countries delivered their promised aid for the justice system and police instead of spending hundreds of millions of dollars on the UN peacekeeping mission, which failed to intervene during the genocide and continues to stand aside during revenge attacks on Hutus.

At first Rwanda said it wanted to get rid of the peacekeepers, whose mandate expired last week. But it agreed to the force being cut by a third to 1,200 troops and 160 military observers. The mandate will not be extended again when it expires in March.

Although the government says foreign criticism as unjust, its attempts to overcome ethnic polarisation have all but collapsed.

The Week

THE European Parliament's decision to ratify a customs union with Ankara, 22 years after it was initiated, was hailed as a move towards fuller EU membership by the Turkish press.

THE party keeping Germany's Chancellor Kohl in power, the Free Democrats, abandoned part of its liberal ideology by supporting a wiretapping law, provoking the resignation of the justice minister, Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger.

AUSTRALIA and Indonesia have agreed a surprise security treaty. The pact ends 18 months of secret negotiation between the prime minister, Paul Keating, and President Suharto.

ISLAMIST guerrillas surrounded a village near Algiers and massacred eight of the villagers in a nearby cemetery, according to the sole survivor.

NEARLY 30 policemen were injured and 78 arrests made when thousands of Vietnamese football fans went on a rampage in Ho Chi Minh City after their team was beaten in the South-east Asian Games.

THE International Committee of the Red Cross said it had suspended its activities in Burundi because of deteriorating security in the country.

THE SPANISH prime minister, Felipe González, said he would seek a fifth term in office, bowing to pressure from a Socialist Party leadership unable to find a suitable successor.

YEMEN and Eritrea agreed a ceasefire to end clashes over the disputed Hanish islands in a key Red Sea shipping lane and area of potential oil exploration. Six Eritreans and three Yemenis were reported killed.

SOUTH KOREA'S parliament passed a law to allow the punishment of two former presidents, Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, for the 1980 Kwangju massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators.

TENSIONS between trade unions and the government remained high in France, despite a steady return to work by public sector workers.

FAMINE is hitting rural areas of North Korea after devastating floods last summer and could spread rapidly unless more outside aid is sent quickly, the UN said.

PRESIDENT Chirac hailed the release of two French pilots by Bosnian Serbs as clearing the way for good Franco-Yugoslav relations. French officials denied making any concessions to win their release.



Flying the flag . . . Palestinians welcoming Yasser Arafat to Nablus last week, where he declared himself a candidate for the presidency. *Washington Post, page 11* PHOTOGRAPH: SVEN NACKSTRAND

Euro tide engulfs Major

John Palmer in Madrid and Michael White

JOHN MAJOR'S dire warnings that European unity could be fatally undermined by a single currency were brushed aside by fellow European Union leaders last week as they unveiled the compromise choice of "Euro" as the new money's name and forged ahead regardless with the Maastricht federal agenda.

In a display of collective will at the Madrid summit, the EU also formally ratified a detailed strategy for beginning monetary union in January 1999 and introducing the single currency in stages over the subsequent three years — with only a modest nod to British demands for a more thorough examination of the risks.

The unanimous agreement to baptise the single currency the Euro was hailed by the president of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, as "an historic and irreversible step to closer European union". The Euro coins and notes will appear in participating states in the first half of 2002 as national currencies are gradually withdrawn.

In remarks seemingly directed at Eurosceptics in Britain, Mr Santer added: "The European Council today gave a strong signal of determination which should discard remaining doubts and hesitations."

The enthusiasm of the majority was in marked contrast to British wariness. But Mr Major's acceptance of the 1998 timetable for a decision on a single currency effectively rules out the option of making an election campaign issue of saying "no" to a single currency in the next parliament. The UK chancellor of the exchequor, Kenneth Clarke, emphatically underlined the point — to the likely dismay of Eurosceptics.

Mr Major and Mr Clarke made plain their fears about an "Alice in Wonderland world" in which national governments might have to tighten their financial belts as the EU spent more to make the currency target happen.

They also insisted successfully that the strict Maastricht-imposed terms for membership will not be watered down in "sweetheart deals" for countries which fail to meet them.

The final decision on the name of the currency was taken with remarkably little difficulty. President Jacques Chirac of France wondered whether a public opinion poll should be held to choose a name but he quickly fell into line.

"It is not the most romantic choice but it will do," said the Swedish prime minister designate, Goran Persson. British ministers agreed. It was "an important but secondary issue" compared with getting the details right, said Mr Clarke.

The summit agreement came on the heels of news that the French strike wave was subsiding and as EU finance ministers expressed hopes that lower international interest rates would boost flagging growth rates in the European economies. "The decision is a triumph for the European Union," the Spanish finance minister, Pedro Solbes, declared. "Economic and Monetary Union will now definitely start on January 1, 1999."

The gulf between Britain and its European partners over the Madrid summit's decision to go all out for monetary union by 1999 will be cruelly highlighted from next month by a multi-million pound campaign to win hearts and minds across the Continent for the Euro.

As the summit majority signalled enthusiasm for the publicity blitz, British ministers from Mr Major down said they had "no plans" to join. But British European Union funds will be used to sell the Euro to the public.

The Bonn government plans its own $10 million campaign to win over those who fear the Euro could prove a weaker currency than the mark. President Chirac said France would do likewise in the drive to obtain economic and monetary union between 1999 and 2002.

Shin Bet feels fall-out from Rabin's killing

Derek Brown in Jerusalem

SIX top officers in Israel's Shin Bet, including the anonymous head of the secret service agency, were on Monday urged to hire lawyers amid mounting evidence of security failures in the inquiry into the assassination of the Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin.

The trial of his confessed killer, Yigal Amir, opened on Tuesday and was adjourned for five weeks. The six officers were warned by the justice ministry that they could be "harmed" by the inquiry. The ministry's letter was also sent to a seventh man, an assistant police commander.

The once formidable reputation of the secret service took another battering with the publication of stills from a shocking amateur videotape of the assassination.

The last eight minutes of the video, shot from a rooftop overlooking the Tel Aviv square where Mr Rabin was attending a vast peace rally, show the self-confessed assassin, Mr Amir, hiding behind a plant in a supposedly secure area at the end of the rally, then walking up to the departing prime minister and shooting him twice in the back.

The tape has been seen by the inquiry commission. Until now, public viewing has been banned. But Israel's Channel Two commercial television station promised it would be shown this week.

Within Israel, the tape is likely to have a saturation audience. It will revive public debate on the failure of the much-vaunted Shin Bet to provide security for the prime minister at a time when tensions were running high over the government's peace policies. Mr Amir has said repeatedly that he shot Mr Rabin for giving away Jewish lands to the enemies of Israel.

In a sense, Shin Bet is itself on trial. One senior officer has resigned and three others have been suspended. The warning from the state inquiry was a clear indication that more Shin Bet heads could roll.

Commentators believe Shin Bet shared the Israeli assumption that whatever the provocation, and however inflammatory the mood, Jews would not kill Jews. It was an assumption reflected in the poor security at the November 4 rally, and in Mr Rabin's cavalier attitude to the dangers of holding high office in a bitterly divided country.

Bosnia peace renews hatred

Continued from page 1

for any of the bad things that happened. They still feel the need to seek revenge. It is happening on all sides."

Ms Pesic and others say the nature of the internecine Balkans conflict and its ending may have thrust a moral reckoning of the past four years beyond grasp, at least for a long time to come.

Unlike previous wars, in which the victor and vanquished were easily recognised and the moral high-ground clear to defend, this war — and its peace — are rife with ambiguity and contradiction. No side has been totally defeated, no one people demoralised and unequivocally condemned.

Michael Williams, a former senior official with the United Nations Protection Force in Zagreb, said the authoritarian and nationalistic nature of governments in the Yugoslav successor states made it difficult for people to get an objective account of events. He is among those who say good and evil have been blurred by the needs, politics and war objectives of the day. In consequence, virtue has been a relative not absolute quality; yesterday's enemy can be today's ally.

State-run media have tailored information to support the official line. Many people in Serbia still have no idea that Bosnian Serbs had a stranglehold on Sarajevo for three years, because television did not report it, Ms Pesic said.

Many thoughtful people have, therefore, found it difficult to know what to believe, the Serbian historian Aleksa Dilas said. Should one heed the news or the whispers of one's conscience?

In time the conscience can fall silent under the barrage of disinformation and rhetoric. With independent voices isolated, no unbiased arbiter has been able to set the record straight, he said.

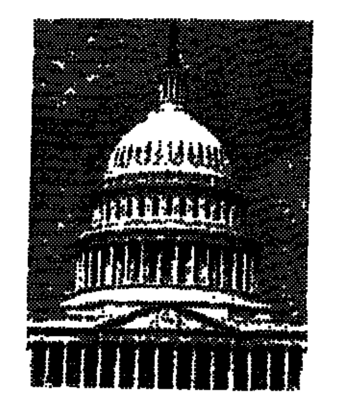
The man considered most responsible for stirring the pot of ethnic animosity — President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia — has been embraced by the world as a peacemaker. Once described by Time magazine as the "butcher of the Balkans", he is now presented as the region's guardian angel, shaking hands with Bill Clinton for the world to see.

President Franjo Tudjman, whose pre-war nationalistic rhetoric and policies stoked fear among Croatian Serbs of a revival of Croatian fascism, has secured a country virtually devoid of minorities, largely by violent ethnic cleansing in Krajina last summer. He did it with the military advice and tacit political consent of the United States.

Alija Izetbegovic, whose Muslims are considered the worst victims, has been left presiding over a country where rebel Serbs have been rewarded with almost half the territory. In compensation, the Americans — cast as moral arbiters in a moral minefield — have promised to increase the powers of destruction in the region by beefing up Muslim armed forces.

"All the villains of this war have survived," Mr Dilas said. "And the Americans, while they haven't sold their whole soul to the devil, at least sold part of it." — *Los Angeles Times*

Christmas gift narrows budget gap



The US this week

Martin Walker

CHRISTMAS came early in Washington, with a $135 billion gift to the politicians on both sides in the budget debate. This wholly notional sum came from an unlikely Santa Claus in the shape of the Congressional Budget Office, which looked again at the economic projections for the next seven years and estimated that the cumulative budget deficits of the next seven years would be $135 billion less than they originally thought. In effect, the White House and the Republican Congress are now $135 billion nearer to a deal than they thought they were. Throw in a likely agreement to adjust the cost-of-living allowances in line with real inflation, which should save another $150 billion or so, and the failure to reach a deal would look criminally irresponsible.

Some astute political figures think that there should be no deal. James Carville, the campaign strategist behind President Clinton's 1992 victory, thinks that Clinton has located such a vote-winning issue in the defence of Medicare and Medicaid that he advocates no surrender, and advises taking the budget stand-off against the Republican Scrooges all the way to the presidential election.

Some Republicans feel that they have an election-winning issue in the need to balance the budget and reduce the burden of the national debt on future generations. As Speaker Newt Gingrich constantly intones, "every innocent American baby born this year comes into the world already owing $184,000".

Political rhetoric aside, it is far from clear whether the public would swallow such a patently artificial attempt to concoct an overheated election year row. There is still a gap of $365 billion between what the Republicans want to cut, and what the White House is prepared to offer. But over a seven-year period, in which the total gross domestic product (GDP) will be well over $60 trillion, this is a difference of about 0.5 per cent of GDP.

This is not the kind of issue on which politicians usually mount the barricades, particularly when the figures in question are so much notional guesswork. Both sides are working on assumptions that unemployment will remain unchanged at around 5.6 per cent, growth will be a steady annual 2.7 per cent or so, inflation will remain tamed below 3 per cent, and long-term interest rates will fall to around 4 per cent.

It may happen, and the economy may spend the next seven years running steadily on course, and perhaps Santa Claus does exist after all. But given the vast Chinese and Asian appetites for food and energy imports in that coming period, grain and oil prices would appear unlikely to co-operate. No matter. The road to the new domestic consensus of leaner, meaner government is being paved with rosy scenarios.

The trickiest part of the calculation is the one about interest rates. One reason Wall Street continues to trade at improbable heights is that the markets are already assuming that a balanced budget deal will be reached. And that assumption is infecting the Federal Reserve board, which appears ready to endorse the deal with a Christmas Eve cut of half a per cent in interest rates.

The Clinton administration, nervous that the economy is slowing uncomfortably as they enter a re-election year, very much wants the Fed to cut the rates in December. If a delayed budget deal stays the Fed's cut until early 1996, Clinton may not get the economic acceleration he wants in time to help him at the polls.

There is much uncertainty about the economy. Manufacturing jobs are declining, just as they did in 1990 before the last recession which sank the Bush presidency. Mortgage rates are at their lowest for two years, but residential property is not doing well. The index of leading indicators, and the index of the National Association of Purchasing Managers have carried warnings of a slowing economy since the end of the summer. But exports and productivity and corporate investment are all still strong.

The likeliest outcome is for the economy to continue growing at a stately and stable rate, but not to the point where voters can feel very good about it. Retail sales are not surging, despite the expected pre-Christmas boom. Sales at department and chain stores fell by 1.6 per cent for the week ending December 2. Household debt is running at a record level of 92 per cent of after-tax income.

But if the budget deal is reached, and most of the senior figures in Congress and White House assume that it will before the State of the Union address next month, then it is not at all clear what the 1996 election will be about, beyond a referendum on President Clinton. And the poll in which he has consistently scored worst, run jointly for CBS-TV and the New York Times, put him above 50 per cent approval for the first time in almost two years. Sixty-one per cent of those questioned believed he was really trying to solve the budget crisis, while only 47 per cent thought the Republicans were.

This may not last. The Senate's Whitewater probe is reaching a tricky point, in which the president is resisting a subpoena to hand over the notes of meetings between his private and his White House lawyers. At last, the Republicans have struck a nerve, and Clinton now looks as if he has something to hide.

Unhappy prospect . . . Mohammad Sarwar, defeated for the Labour nomination, outside his Govan wholesale business in Glasgow PHOTOGRAPH: MURDO MacLEOD

Asian accuses 'racist' Labour

Erlend Clouston

THE Labour Party was accused of institutional racism last week after 52 disqualified votes apparently cost an Asian businessman the nomination for a safe Commons seat, depriving him of the chance of becoming Britain's first Muslim MP.

Mohammad Sarwar, a 43-year-old cash-and-carry millionaire, said he would ask the party's national executive committee to overturn a result in which Mike Watson, MP for Glasgow Central, secured the nomination for Glasgow Govan by one vote.

Mr Sarwar, a Glasgow councillor and friend of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's prime minister, said he was "annoyed and depressed".

"This is a clear message from the Labour party," Muhammad Shoaib, vice chairman of the constituency party, said. "If you're of Muslim, or Pakistani background, you're not on."

The blurred result was a nightmare for the Scottish Labour party, which had hoped the account would draw a line under a campaign distinguished mainly by accusations of dirty tricks.

The NEC must now adjudicate on the decision by its representative, Glasgow organiser Lesley Quinn, to rule out 52 postal votes. Mr Sarwar claimed most would have gone to him.

One of Mr Watson's two scrutineers refused to accept signatures on ballot forms which the other five scrutineers had approved. It is understood that many Asian women signed their votes with the term Bibi or Begum, as opposed to the Miss or Mrs featured on their party membership cards.

Murdoch wins in media free-for-all

Andrew Culf

THE Government unleashed a virtual media ownership free-for-all, but retreated from plans to impose tough new curbs on Rupert Murdoch's empire, when it published the Broadcasting Bill last week.

Virginia Bottomley, National Heritage Secretary, revealed details of a package which she said would provide the launch-pad for British companies to compete globally.

The bill — the first substantial piece of media legislation for five years — lays down the framework for an explosion of choice for viewers with the possibility of up to 36 new digital channels.

In the City, share prices climbed in ITV companies seen as likely takeover targets after the lifting of the two-licence limit. Granada-London Weekend Television and MAI, owners of Meridian and Anglia, are seen as potential bidders for Yorkshire-Tyne Tees.

Most newspaper groups welcomed the new ownership rules, which will permit them to control ITV companies for the first time. But Mr Murdoch's News International and Mirror Group are barred from moving into ITV because they each exceed the threshold of 20 per cent of total national circulation.

The measures do not prevent them from expanding their cable and satellite interests and they will be permitted to run digital television services. Mrs Bottomley denied she had been too kind to Mr Murdoch. "We believe the necessary checks are in place. Mr Murdoch has no reason to be upset . . . we cannot have a charter for a monopoly, but we are saying we want big successful British companies to win those new opportunities."

Mr Murdoch responded with anger in May when the Government published the first draft of its proposals, describing them as "proposals of old, vested and often unsuccessful interests". But the response from News International was measured: "There is nothing in this bill that inhibits our current business."

Mr Murdoch's anger seems to have abated because the Government has significantly backtracked from long-term plans to impose a 10 per cent limit on total share of the national media cake.

The most wounded response to the long-awaited bill came from Channel 4, despite its winning a significant concession.

The safety net funding formula, under which Channel 4 is likely to pay ITV £300 million in five years, is to be reviewed from 1998, as Whitehall officials insisted they wanted to reduce the burden on the station.

The BBC won a victory in its campaign to manage its own digital multiplex, which means it will be able to offer up to six new services, including 24-hour news coverage.

Classic FM and the other national commercial radio stations were guaranteed long-term stability if they invest in digital radio.

● Rupert Murdoch's stranglehold on pay television tightened further last week as BSkyB formed a partnership with Granada to launch eight new satellite channels next year.

Granada said BSkyB's expertise in marketing and managing subscription services made them natural allies for the venture.

The admission by Granada, one of the most powerful ITV broadcasters, that it could not rival BSkyB's dominance of pay TV illustrates Mr Murdoch's effective monopoly of the market. The two-year £25 million investment is expected to move into profit by 1999.

Lottery regulator flouted the rules

Edward Pilkington

VIRGINIA BOTTOMLEY, the National Heritage Secretary, is facing a fresh row over her refusal to sack the National Lottery regulator, Peter Davis, after she revealed that he spurned ministry advice not to take free rides on private jets during a visit to the US.

The fate of Mr Davis was in the balance this week. On Monday, the Oflot chief met senior government officials to explain why he accepted helicopter and jet rides from GTech, an American firm associated with the lottery operator, Camelot.

In addition to the five free jet flights which he admitted to MPs last week, it has emerged he took rides in GTech's private helicopter from New York to Long Island, and from there to Albany.

Mr Davis has said he considers himself to be a victim of a campaign to discredit him.

The controversy follows a BBC Panorama programme in which Richard Branson, the head of Virgin, accused GTech of attempting to bribe him out of the race to run the lottery.

The Commons public accounts committee is considering the way in which Oflot was established. There is growing unease that Mr Davis and his team were responsible for judging the race to run the lottery and for monitoring the performance of the winners.

Mr Davis announced last week that he is setting up an inquiry into allegations that GTech attempted to bribe Mr Branson to pull out of the bid to run it.

Meanwhile, Mr Branson last week followed the adage that the best form of defence is attack when he issued a libel writ against GTech for attempted bribery.

Writs for defamation were issued in the High Court and served on the Rhode Island-based company and its employee Robert Rendine over their claims that Mr Branson was lying about the alleged attempted bribe. Mr Rendine has accused Mr Branson of waging an "evil smear" campaign.

Further writs are expected to be issued soon against Guy Snowden, the GTech executive accused by Mr Branson of attempting to bribe him. Mr Snowden has denied any impropriety.

Mr Branson said he had taken the unusual step of issuing writs given GTech's "attack upon my integrity and the importance of the issues". He is said to be determined to take the case to court to have the alleged scandal aired in public.

McGuinness rules out hope of IRA surrender on arms

David Sharrock

SINN FEIN'S Martin McGuinness this week told the international body on illegal weapons that there is not "the remotest possibility" of the IRA giving up any arms before a political settlement has been negotiated.

The body, set up by John Major and the Irish prime minister John Bruton as part of the "twin-track" process leading to all-party talks, heard evidence from Sinn Fein and the Irish government.

Mr McGuinness, the Sinn Fein chief negotiator, met the body, comprising the former US senator George Mitchell, General John de Chastelain of Canada and former Finnish prime minister Harri Holkeri, on Monday at Dublin Castle.

On BBC Radio Ulster on Sunday he was asked about the prospect of a handover of weapons by the IRA.

"I don't believe that there is anybody seriously engaged in the in-depth discussions and negotiations of this process who believes that there is even the remotest possibility of any of that happening, whether it is from the British army, the loyalists, the RUC or the IRA, in the absence of a negotiated settlement."

His comments angered Mr Major, who will visit Northern Ireland and Dublin this week, for linking illegally held arms and security force weapons.

Later, in Derry, Mr McGuinness told a meeting that his party will request the international body to ask the Government for the Stalker, Sampson and Stevens reports into shoot-to-kill and collusion allegations. "British weapons are a central element. No examination of the arms issue by the international body can be complete without it addressing these issues," he said.

The Defence Secretary, Michael Portillo, last week ruled out further troop reductions in Northern Ireland before the new year because of the continuing threat of a resumption of the paramilitaries' campaigns of violence.

● A man was shot dead on Monday night in what was feared to be the latest IRA assassination of republican elements involved in the illegal drugs trade.

Security sources said they believed the attack was the fourth murder this year of people suspected of being involved in drugs dealing.

Taxonomy hits the jackpot

TWO Danish biologists have discovered a new form of life, *writes Tim Radford*. It dwells on the lips of the Norway lobster. *Symbion pandora* is not just a new species, or a new genus, or family, class or order. It is the big one: a new phylum.

This is taxonomy's jackpot. There may be 30 million species of animal, but all of them fit into about 35 really basic categories. One category, the chordates, includes humans and horses, wombats and wolves. Another is the arthropods, that assembly of jointy-legged things with outer shells, which includes spiders, ants, flies — and Norway lobsters.

But Pandora occupies a phylum all of its own. According to Nature magazine, it looks like an animated cold sore.

The phylum it is in has been dubbed Cycliophora, which is Greek for "carrying a small wheel". That is because it has a circular mouth ring, right next to its anus.

Pandora's larvae swim freely; during this teenage period, however, they are truly brainless. The brain reappears in adult life. There was debate about Pandora's sex life and whether it has one penis or two but there was confirmation that Pandora could have it both ways, by budding asexually and by mating. "It is unlike anything we have seen before," a museum scientist said.

In Brief

A NATIONWIDE amnesty to encourage people to hand in knives has been launched following the death of Philip Lawrence, the headmaster stabbed as he tried to protect a pupil from a gang of youths.

SARA THORNTON, jailed for killing her husband six years ago, will face a fresh trial in the new year after the Court of Appeal quashed her murder conviction but ruled that a jury must decide on her claims that she was provoked.

ADE ONIBIYO, the teenage son of a deported Nigerian pro-democracy activist, won the first stage in a High Court battle to prevent his own deportation when he was granted permission to challenge the Home Secretary's decision to send him back to Nigeria.

KENNETH CLARKE, the Chancellor, reinforced his Budget tax reduction with the first cut in interest rates for almost two years.

THE SUDDEN death of the former government whip, Sir David Lightbown, reduced the Tory Commons majority to five. In the same week the MP for South-east Cornwall, Robert Hicks, became the 50th Tory to announce that he will not fight the next general election.

THE GOVERNMENT made a U-turn over its new immigration clampdown when it announced that regulations withdrawing welfare benefits from 13,000 asylum-seekers were to be postponed.

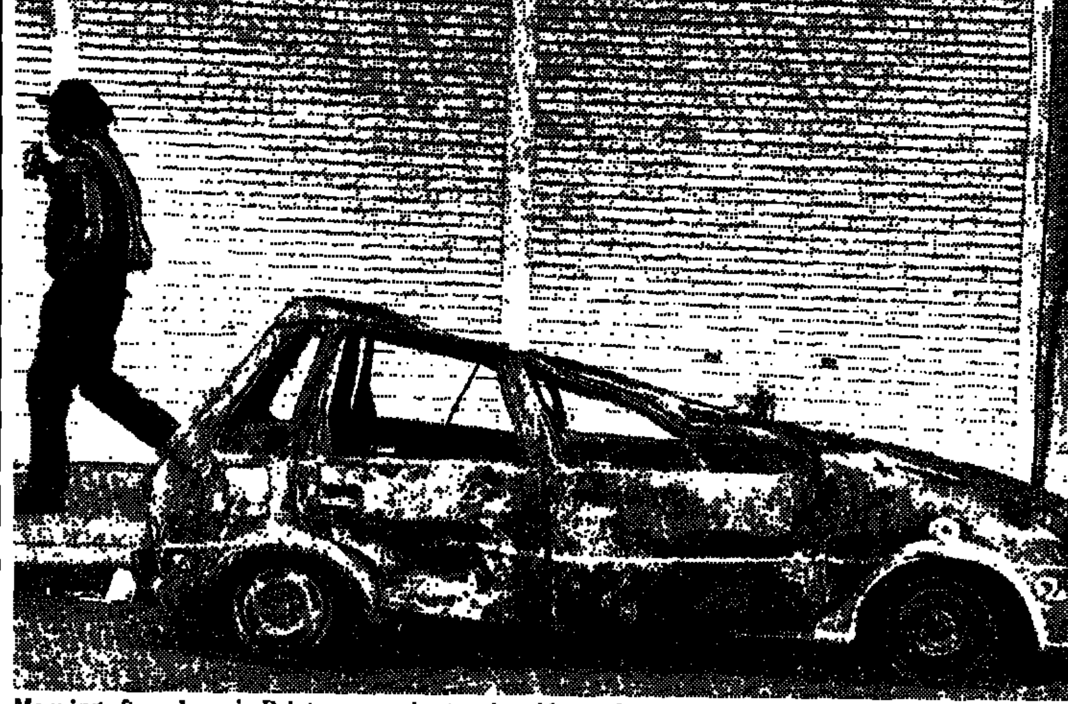
THE Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, announced a radical divorce reform to ease the plight of Orthodox Jewish women refused a religious divorce by their husbands.

EXPLORER Roger Mear has been forced to abandon his attempted record-breaking solo walk across Antarctica after only six weeks because of the failure of vital equipment.

THE FAST FOOD chain, Burger King, has paid out £106,000 in compensation to 900 of its staff who were told to clock off on unpaid breaks whenever restaurants were quiet.

PAUL GRECIAN, the former arms dealer and MI6 informant, is being held in a South African jail after being arrested on a US Interpol warrant in connection with arms exports to Iraq.

THE CHIEF Inspector of Prisons, General Sir David Ramsbotham, has taken the unprecedented step of halting an inspection of Holloway, Britain's largest women's jail, because he was appalled by the conditions.



Morning after: shops in Brixton were shuttered and burned out cars stood by the kerb PHOTO: TOM JENKINS

Violence sets Brixton ablaze

Guardian Reporters

RIOT police clashed with demonstrators last week as a protest against the death of a second black man in police custody in six months erupted into violence which swept through Brixton, south London, in some of the worst scenes of civil disorder since the poll tax riots.

Three police officers and seven civilians were injured, and hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of damage was caused to property throughout the area. Mounted police were called in to break up the crowds after rioting broke out just after 8pm on Wednesday of last week. Shops were petrol bombed and dozens of cars set on fire.

What began as a small demonstration by around 100 youths, black and white, outside Brixton police station following the death earlier this month of Wayne Douglas, aged 26, descended into violence as they broke into groups which were repeatedly charged by mounted police.

Witnesses accused the police of heavy-handed tactics. Police blamed the irresponsibility of the demonstrators, saying they "were given every opportunity to disperse but did not take it". The police said youths were hurling bricks, petrol bombs and blocks of concrete at their officers and at shops. Widespread looting took place as in the Brixton riots of 1981 and 1985.

The police may bring incitement to riot charges against speakers and organisers of the rally which led to the riots. Twelve people, including three police officers, were treated for their injuries in hospital. One officer, who had been pulled off his motorcycle, suffered a broken collar bone and one member of the public was seriously ill with a collapsed lung.

The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Paul Condon, said that there would be an investigation into what he described as the inflammatory nature of the speeches to see if incitement had taken place.

Both Government and Opposition front benches dismissed the riot as sheer criminality, refusing to accept high unemployment or insensitive policing as causes.

Comment, page 8

Anger greets 'boozer's charter'

Chris Mihill

MINISTERS last week were caught in a storm of hostility from the medical establishment and anti-alcohol groups after reversing a century of government efforts to curb drinking and issuing what was quickly dubbed a "boozer's charter".

The World Health Organisation led a chorus of protests from doctors and road safety bodies, who accused the Government of sending confused and harmful signals to drinkers.

They argued that new limits on the amounts that ministers claimed were safe to drink would scupper the Christmas anti-drink drive campaign and persuade many that drinking at any level is good for you.

Accusations that the Government is sending a mixed message over safe drinking levels follows controversy over its efforts to reassure public opinion over the safety of eating beef.

The new guidelines do away with the previous weekly "sensible" limits of 21 units for men and 14 for women and replace them with daily limits. Men should drink no more than three to four units a day, and women two to three, they say. A unit is a half-pint of beer, a glass of wine or a single measure of spirits.

The chairman of the British Medical Association, Dr Sandy Macara, said that the Government's action on drinking was "both irresponsible and badly timed".

The guidelines — based on scientific evidence that a small amount of alcohol protects against heart disease — mark a reversal from previous policy, which was to reduce drinking levels or at least not to encourage higher consumption.

In June, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Royal College of General Practitioners all said that the drinking limits should not be increased, and it was wrong to encourage people to drink more in the belief it would protect them against heart disease. All criticised the new guidelines.

The Royal College of Physicians said: "By raising the 'sensible limits' people are being encouraged to drink more."

Railtrack plans £10 billion upgrade

A £10 BILLION investment programme for the railway industry was announced by Railtrack on Sunday in an attempt by the Government to head off a growing revolt among Tory MPs who fear rail privatisation may be an election loser, *writes Keith Harper*.

Railtrack's plans are in draft form only, and despite a glowing foreword by its chairman, Bob Horton, are more modest than a 10-year plan issued four years ago by British Rail. This argued for a minimum investment of £10-12 billion, and said the industry was suffering 60 per cent under-investment.

Industry sources pointed out that in the private sector there would be no guarantee that the plans would be realised. Privatisation is expected to cut 22,000 jobs, 20 per cent of the industry's workforce.

The Government also abandoned its policy of basing privatised rail passenger services on the existing BR timetable by effectively "rewriting the rules" in an extraordinary U-turn designed to keep its franchising programme on course and paving the way for cuts.

The rethink was immediately condemned by the Save Our Railways pressure group and by the Opposition as an underhand way of getting around a Court of Appeal decision last week which ruled in the campaigners' favour.

Hindley is 'national scapegoat'

David Rowan and Duncan Campbell

IN HER first full account of her struggle to come to terms with her crimes, the Moors murderer Myra Hindley made the remarkable admission that she was "more culpable" than Ian Brady in the five child killings they carried out together in the 1960s.

In an article in Monday's Guardian, she said she was "evil and wicked" and wished she had a mental illness which would offer some explanation for her actions.

Ms Hindley, aged 53, who was jailed for life in 1966, said she worshipped Brady and suffered a "fatal weakness" for him. But she admitted the murders could not have taken place without her and the fact she was a woman made it easier to abduct their victims.

Her account is likely to re-open the controversy over whether she should ever be considered for release. She says she is a very different woman from the "creature" who committed the crimes. In December last year the Home Office told her she would remain in jail for the rest of her life.

Ms Hindley wrote that:

❑ She can offer no justification for her role. "I take full responsibility for the part I played in the offences, and will not attempt to justify the unjustifiable."

❑ Without her the murders could not have been committed. She was "instrumental in procuring the children, who would more readily accompany strangers if they were a woman and a man than they would a man on his own."

❑ She was aware of the horrific nature of the crimes and was thus deserving of greater blame than Brady. "I know the difference between right and wrong and I cared deeply about that difference, though I locked these feelings away. I never attempted to justify my actions either to myself or Ian Brady, and in all these respects I was the more culpable of the two."

She feels that she satisfies the need for a "national scapegoat" and that the Government uses her to show it is enforcing a tough stance on crime. People are unwilling to accept that she has changed. "They prefer to keep me frozen in time together with that awful mugshot."

Ann West, the mother of one of the murdered children, Lesley Ann Downey, said: "She is a born liar. That witch would say anything to get out of jail."

Ms Hindley wrote to the Guardian in October when she took offence at a book extract in the Guardian by Ann Moir and David Jessel. The article explored whether dangerous criminals invariably have mental disorders and referred to Ms Hindley in a passage about women psychopaths.

"To be casually labelled a psychopath by two people who have never met or spoken to me flies in the face of reason," she responded, saying there was no evidence of a disordered mind. The Guardian invited her to justify her claims.

Home Office ministers were considering disciplinary action against her. They were studying a rule which forbids inmates from writing to journalists about their crimes except for "serious representations about conviction or sentence".

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
December 24 1995

A Russian vote for democracy

WHY SHOULD we not congratulate the Russian people? The absence of democracy was the constant theme of western criticism: now they have it across 11 international time zones. It was feared that this time round the electorate would vote in smaller numbers. Instead, overall turnout in wintry conditions was nearly two-thirds of the register — a substantial increase compared with just over half in 1993.

The Communists may not be to everyone's taste, Vladimir Zhirinovsky to far fewer. But it is hard to argue that any of the parties which did badly deserved to do much better or offered any convincing programme to tackle Russia's difficulties. The problem is less the result than the negative mood in which the electorate went to the polls. This was a vote in reaction against "the reforms", though not necessarily against the right sort of reform. It was always by implication a vote against Boris Yeltsin: his own clumsy attempt last week to dissuade Russians from voting for the Communists made this explicit. The anger and impatience of the Russian electorate can be understood, yet a negative vote is not the best basis on which to build a new sense of democratic trust.

The immediate question which Mr Yeltsin must face is whether to pay any attention to the results. He may well calculate that parliament can be written off for the next six months as an opposition-dominated platform: this will hardly improve the chances for himself or whoever stands on his platform in the June presidential election. He may be tempted to postponement, yet if the electorate responds in such numbers to a ballot for the hamstrung Duma, how much more will they demand to take part, on time, in choosing the next president? Mr Yeltsin now has to decide whether to re-offer himself for election or try to boost the dubious prospects of Viktor Chernomyrdin, who has just waged a disastrous and widely mocked campaign.

Sunday's result is not just a vote against the president in person but against the chaotic reforms and mounting corruption over which he has presided. It is time to take a longer look at the whole process and the defects which it has revealed in the so-called transition from "communism" to "capitalism" — both highly suspect terms which we have to use for shorthand purposes. As a recent study from Cambridge University (China's Rise, Russia's Fall, by Peter Nolan) argues, this transition has been naively thought of as one from "plan" to "market". Yet the Soviet Union was always a command economy rather than one planned on rational lines. In the transition towards the market, a central condition of success is the ability to temper new economic forces by effective planning. Whatever the shape of the Duma, or the identity next year of a new president, Russia still has to solve the puzzle of this transition.

Building a new Bosnia

A SHEAF of paper was signed in Paris last week, bulging with intricate measures to restore peace to Bosnia. The general agreement with its 11 annexes attempts to do four things simultaneously: to police an effective boundary between the two "entities" (the Bosnian Serb and Bosnia-Herzegovina Republics), to stabilise the region by arms control and confidence-building measures, to establish a constitution and functioning parliament, and to guarantee and protect all human rights. Bosnians on both sides regard it correctly as the dismantling of an internationally recognised state, not the start of its re-creation.

This may be the best, after four years, to be achieved. The military gains this summer of the Sarajevo-Croatian alliance, if pushed further, could have brought in Serbia and split the alliance at the same time. A partition between victim and aggressor, along the infamous 51-49 per cent split, had already been legitimised by a succession of international negotiators. The reality by 1995 was that if it were done, it would have to be done quickly. What are the chances of delivering something worthwhile? We shall know before very long. The first task is the very specific one of demilitarising the cease-fire line and vacating areas now occupied by the "wrong" side. The Nato implementation force (I-for) is authorised to use "necessary force" to see this done. Both sides may acquiesce since their priority is to build a secure base for the future. If they do not then Nato will be faced early on with the dilemma the UN could never solve over how much force is "necessary".

Larger question-marks hang over subsequent stages of the process particularly in the disarmament measures which have been separated from the ceasefire and do not carry any enforcement clause. Will, for example, the two sides really disband their special operations and armed civilian groups within 45 days? Will they reach "early agreement" on lower levels of armaments, with precise numbers of tanks, artillery, etc.? If not, is there any hope of imposing limits according to "the approximate ratios of populations"?

The clock will also soon tick forward to deadlines for holding elections under OSCE supervision at the latest by next September. It may seem of little importance. The constitution imposed by the agreement almost guarantees deadlock between the two sides on any difficult issue if a federal government is elected. But failure to surmount this hurdle will send another signal of failure — only months before I-for is likely to withdraw.

The fourth and hardest test, also devoid of enforcement provision, is for measures to investigate and prosecute war crimes. Will the most notorious war criminals, Radovan Karadzic and General Mladic, as well as a host of the lesser-known, merely step back a few paces to enjoy the fruits of their evil crimes, and remain in reserve to resume their activities if the process breaks down? There was, we are assured, no secret deal to this effect behind the release of the two French pilots. But we fear there may be no conspicuous striving either to bring them to justice. That is too high a price to pay for a very imperfect future.

Brixton is not yet a burnt-out case

PERHAPS it was tempting fate. Two months ago reporters returned to Brixton for the tenth anniversary of the 1985 riots. Heartening stories were filed about an inner city area which was rejuvenating itself. New jobs, new projects and a new five-year programme were forging a New Brixton. In the words of the chief executive of the regeneration programme, there was "a great sense of energy, vibrancy and optimism — the riots are part of our history but we have moved on". Last week's riots no longer carry the shock that the first round caused in 1981. In the opening words of the Scarman report, "the British people watched with horror and incredulity . . . scenes of violence and disorder in their capital city, the like of which had not previously been seen in this century in Britain."

There are two reasons for this lack of shock. Regrettably, riots have become a familiar phenomenon in the past 14 years — not just in inner cities but on the outer rim too. More hopefully, 1995 was not 1981. This was not a community in revolt but a small number of protesters many of whom were sincerely, and understandably, distressed by the death of a second black man in police custody in the district within six months, but a minority of whom wanted to cause trouble and admitted as much.

The precise chronology of events is disputed but two events poured petrol on the simmering anger of the demonstrators: the latest edition of the black newspaper, The Voice, with its front page interview of an anonymous witness who claims to have seen the police beating up the man who died in custody; and Rudy Narayan, the black lawyer expelled from the Bar, who in an inflammatory address told the crowd "the Brixton police are killers. They will not understand what they have done until one of them has been killed".

All three political parties rightly condemned the violence. A legitimate demonstration is no excuse for looting or fire-bombing. Clearly better communication needs to be maintained with local communities during official inquiries into complaints about police abuse.

Brixton last week was a grim reminder that it is easier to destroy than to build. Community groups and entrepreneurs have been rehabilitating Brixton for more than a decade. It is easy to make inflammatory speeches; much, much harder to build up community groups and local businesses. There are two immediate challenges: ending the sense of exclusion which some young black people express; and introducing an accountable police service.

Wasting disease that hollows out Europe

Martin Woollacott

CAN A Europe worth living in be built on the wreckage of the hopes and values that have sustained it in the past? That is the question being thrust before us by French workers and students.

Talk of Maastricht criteria, of German demands, and of welfare reform, tend to create the idea that European union, and the price to be paid for it, is the central issue. But Europe's overriding problem is not monetary union or any other form of greater integration. It is a crisis which existed before Maastricht was even thought of and which would exist if Maastricht had *never* been thought of. European union is not its cause and cannot be its cure.

Europe is in the grip of a disease. It has been repeatedly diagnosed by the more far-sighted among economists and political scientists. Everybody knows it and speaks of it in a generalised way, and yet, like relatives refusing to admit the condition of a loved one, everybody tiptoes around the sick-bed, attending to everything except the basic cause.

It is a disease that eats away first at the social tissue of the working population, and then attacks the blood-systems of social help.

Its destructive energy comes from a powerful dynamic, part greed, part fear, that moves an insecure majority, a fearful business class, and panicky governments, to increasing neglect of what were once seen as their duties. It has come later to the continent than it came to America and Britain, but it has come.

To call this disease unemployment, or a consequence of economic liberalisation, is to slip back into terminology that narrows and distorts the reality. This is not a matter of people out of work but of a ruinous revolution in behaviour that touches everything, from education to marriage and clothes. Why are there so many combat boots and knives in shop windows, so much survivalist rubbish, so much aggression even in high fashion? The world of winners and losers is dressing itself for the fray.

The stages of the disease are well-known, although they chase one another in a circle that makes it difficult to say which comes first. But there is the shrinkage in employment as companies and governments seek the benefits from junking their broader responsibilities, then the realisation that without tax increases the old support systems cannot be paid for, along with the conclusion that appropriate tax increases are politically impossible.

We get so conditioned to this sequence that even those opposed to it often accept that it is in some way natural. The rest of Europe is invited to be horrified that French public service pensions are 70 per cent of earnings before retirement, that the French have a free choice of doctors, and a lot of local hospitals supervised by local people, or that French railway lines reach small towns. How pathetic, how ridiculous! We order things better elsewhere in Europe.

Few dare directly ask, now, why our societies are supposed not to be able to afford such things? No doubt there could and should be changes in welfare systems. But welfare protests in Europe, of which France offers the most dramatic example, are, beyond the sectional interests which undoubtedly operate, opposed not to reform but to the illusory cure of cutting. For the first cuts are never the last. Governments cut first fat, then muscle, then bone. As costs migrate from caring to guarding, from the welfare state to the lock-up state, they save less than they expected. The phrase "another round of cuts" is wearily familiar. There is always another round, as the British civil service, for example, is now discovering.

Firms do the same, as they move work out of their own relatively regulated structures into a contractors' jungle outside. A weaker and weaker central structure, less and less well financed, is faced with more and more demands it cannot meet. Fewer jobs or worse jobs, less help for those without jobs. What could be more insane?

Cuts feed on themselves, always creating the need for more cuts. The arrogance of governments that repeatedly offer this cure is akin to that of surgeons repeatedly performing an unsuccessful operation. The national dimension here can be crucial, when cuts are seen as particularly aimed at the structures that created modern nations — such as the post, the railways, popular education and universal health care — representatives of all of which, it is worth noting, are prominent on the streets of France today. Those who work for them have some consciousness of their historic nation-building role, and know that more is being slashed than jobs or pensions.

THOUGH the disease we suffer from is not essentially connected with the European enterprise, there is one obvious point at which the one aggravates the other.

The German version of the culture of contentment includes a very specific prejudice against any redistribution of German wealth being effected by the spendthrift habits of other Europeans. This is perhaps more important than alleged nightmares about the return of wheelbarrow money. The Germans fear a kind of theft of their assets, and this has added to the pressure on other governments to cut their deficit spending.

It is only France, with its tradition of physical rebellion when the people intuit that the government has lost its grip, that could have staged this battle. There is too much order in Germany and Sweden, too much distraction in Spain and Italy, too much apathy in Britain. Europe's resignation, its sense of slowly drifting into worse times, is suddenly confronted by youthful energy and by union resolve, phenomena we had almost forgotten.

That is heartening as well as worrying. Those on the streets may not have the answers, but they are powerfully expressing the belief, shared all over the continent, that the solutions to our predicament offered by our governments and business classes are inappropriate and risk making it worse. This is the real threat to Europe, and to European union.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
December 24 1995

France is in two moods over strikes

Laurent Greilsamer

FOR more than two weeks the French have been living with one of the least violent and most consensual social conflicts in their history, in which they are taking turns at playing two different roles — the imaginary striker and the whingeing citizen. France appears to be cultivating a mild form of schizophrenia.

It is not two Frances that are confronting one another: a France of government employees and a France of private sector workers. No, it is the same France, suffering and rebellious, hurt and combative, that is taking part in a social movement in which it is both a keen and helpless player.

Behind the unrest there appears to be a France that is united in mourning the passing away of an era of benefits that it thought had been won for all time, the "30 glorious years" after the second world war, the years of strong and sustained growth that wiped out unemployment — a France that has long since disappeared.

Looked at in this way, the strikers are not the ambassadors of private sector employees, who are expected to work to keep their jobs. Striking railway workers and non-strikers alike cultivate a nostalgia for a way of life that is under threat. However modest that life may be, it is made up of a well-established social order, a source of better health, more leisure and well-being.

That is the nub of the crisis, because this world is crumbling and order is collapsing. And French society, lacking leaders capable of explaining the loss and persuading people to come to terms with it, takes to the street to protest or silently puts up with monstrous traffic jams and enforced early morning walks.

What the French are bewailing is the end of a golden age, a glorious past that has already become a legend. A France patiently built up in the aftermath of the 1936 Popular Front victory and during the brief revolutionary itch that seized the country after the Liberation.

Isn't this France a thing of the past? People sense it and are racked by anxiety. They do not know how to express their pain. They are haunted by two fears: that of soon seeing a majority of young people reduced to unemployment or working in low-paid jobs, and the fear of becoming, in old age, a shabby community, lacking in resources and without a roof over their heads.

Coming after 10 long years of austerity, people find Juppé's new therapy unacceptable. The prime minister's clumsiness, his strategy of playing his cards close to the chest, and his inability to explain his views have ended up crystallising the crisis. Glum and depressed, France has gone on strike as if on a pilgrimage, becoming actively involved in a social movement that is beyond it and which it does not fully understand, but of which it vaguely approves.

Aggressive behaviour is rare, whether in the factory, the office, or the street. This was seen in the first week of the strikes, when it became clear people would be handling the stoppages with stoicism. Commuters deprived of transport proved to be courageous and persevering in the way they battled to get to work without railing too much against the strikers. It was as if these so-called hostages had been hypnotised.

A November 23 opinion poll showed 62 per cent support for striking government employees. A fortnight later, support still stood at 59 per cent.

This is not to say that people readily accept this social unrest. But obviously they find it understandable, not to say natural. The confusion affords them an opportunity to express their nostalgia for the past and their bewilderment that the past can no longer serve as a model for the future.

(December 9)



Message of defiance . . . demonstrators hold flares as they follow a procession of protesters through the streets of Paris
PHOTOGRAPH: JEAN-CHRISTOPHE KAHN

Pensions prove to be a sticking point

Rafaële Rivais

IN addition to the social security system, 17 special pension schemes are among the social advantages that government employees are not prepared to give up.

The special schemes were established in the 19th century, and most of them were consolidated at the end of the second world war. At the time, state employees refused to let their pension schemes become part of the national social security system. Under the national scheme, retirement is at the age of 65, whereas the special schemes offer retirement at 55 or even 50.

Most of the pension schemes are in the red and have to be topped up by the state. The total state contribution in 1994 was F125 billion ($25 billion).

The prime minister, Alain Juppé, says he wants to keep the special schemes. There are three solutions for keeping them afloat: lengthening the contribution period, increasing contributions, or reducing the pensions paid out. The government chose the first solution in the plan that it announced on November 15. Private sector employees were required in 1993 to contribute for 40, instead of 37½ years, in order to qualify for a full pension. State employees could still retire after 37½ years' service provided they had reached the age limit.

Juppé's announcement touched off strikes on the railways, Paris's transport services and government departments. Facing increasing opposition to this proposal, the prime minister said on December 5 that working more years would no longer be a condition for reforming the special pension schemes.

A government commission, chaired by Dominique Le Vert, that will examine pensions will, however, be free to propose changes in the retirement age in certain professions. But it will take into consideration the hardships involved in the work and the constraints of working hours.

At the moment, the minimum retirement age is 60 — as in the private sector before 1983 — for 65 per cent of public service employees. It is 55, or even 50, for 35 per cent of employees considered to be doing work "involving special risks or exceptional fatigue".

Primary school teachers can retire at 55, but the limit for new, better qualified recruits is 60. Postal workers at sorting offices can retire at 55. The retiring age for police officers is 50, prison officers 50, nurses 55, and railwaymen 50 for drivers and 55 for others. The 30,000 employees of the Paris Métro have an average retirement age of 53.

Two-thirds of the "active" employees and those working in conditions that can damage health in the public gas and electric utility retire at 55. Retirement age for notary's clerks is 55 for women, and 60 for men. For miners, retirement is at 55.

Comparing the national pension scheme and the special schemes is not easy, because state employees receive bonuses — some of them substantial — which are not included in calculating their contributions or their pensions.

(December 10/11)

Qatar kicks out against the Saudis

GW: Dec. 24, 95

Françoise Chipaux in Muscat

QATAR sprang a surprise on member countries by boycotting the closing session of the 16th Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) summit, which ended on December 6 in Muscat, the Omani capital.

Taking part for the first time in a summit of the GCC, which consists of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Arab Emirates and Oman, the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad al-Thani, who ousted his father in June, abruptly broke the organisation's consensus rule. He did so in protest against the manner in which Jamil al-Houjailan, formerly Saudi Arabia's ambassador to France, was nominated as the organisation's new general secretary for three years.

Qatar, which was fielding its own candidate, pointed out that the GCC charter required such an appointment to be agreed unanimously by the council members. But the other members, who supported the Saudi candidate, decided on a majority vote.

Qatar has for some years been trying to assert the independence of its policies by every means possible, and this is not the first time it has gone out on a limb. But the move could compromise its membership of the GCC.

The setback to Qatari diplomacy comes only a month after its failure at the Amman economic summit to have its capital, Doha, chosen as the venue of the next conference.

There is little doubt that the unpredictability of Qatari foreign policy is worrying GCC officials. "It's time to cut Qatar down to size," said a Saudi official. "We can't allow the GCC to be held hostage by 70,000 Qataris."

The summit ended without an announcement as to where the next meeting would take place, though theoretically it should be Doha. Qatar's foreign minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr al-Thani, simply said that "no decision has been taken" and refused to say whether his country would be withdrawing from the GCC. "Nothing has been decided yet," he added.

The final statement, approved by all the participants, ignored the call by the UAE president, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, in October for reconciliation with Iraq and for the lifting of the UN embargo. Instead it urged "maintaining international pressure on the Baghdad government so that it complies with all the UN resolutions".

It also urged the UN special commission on Iraqi disarmament to develop means to monitor Iraqi weapons, and promised financial and political assistance to help the commission to continue its work.

So the new general secretary will be starting his mandate in a strained atmosphere. The GCC foreign ministers' meeting with their Syrian and Egyptian counterparts on December 27 in Damascus will reveal how far Qatar is prepared to take this dispute.

(December 8)

Argentine torturer sacked

Christine Legrand in Buenos Aires

ARGENTINE human rights groups and France have scored an unexpected victory. Navy commander Alfredo Astiz, aged 45, a symbol of the repression of the military regime that ruled the country from 1976-83, has been told to leave the navy before the end of the year and take early retirement.

Astiz infiltrated the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo group in 1977, when they were secretly preparing the struggle to trace their children and grandchildren who had been listed as missing. His victims were abducted and taken to the navy engineering school, Esma, Buenos Aires's most notorious torture camp.

Among the 30,000 victims of the military who "disappeared" in this way were the first president of the Mothers, Azucena Devincenti, a Swedish teenager, Dagmar Hagelin; and two French nuns, Alice Domon and Léonie Duquet.

France tried Astiz *in absentia* and sentenced him in 1990 to life imprisonment for the last two murders. Granted an amnesty in his own country, the commander expected to be promoted to the rank of captain. The navy chief of staff, Admiral Enrique Molina Pico, recently supported Astiz's application for promotion and praised him for his "moral qualities".

President Carlos Menem's planned visit to France in February and pressure from within Argentina account for the abrupt turnaround. The Argentine Senate commission, which was to examine Astiz's application for promotion, last year rejected similar petitions from two officers who admitted torturing prisoners during the military's repression.

Ten years after the sensational trial that ended in long prison terms for the leaders of the military junta, Astiz has been dumped by his fellow officers. And an international warrant for his arrest issued by France will prevent him from travelling abroad.

(December 8)

Publish and be acclaimed

Marion Van Renterghem looks at the commercial demands behind France's leading literary awards

THE most important of France's annual crop of book prizes are the Prix Goncourt, which has been going since 1903, and the Prix Renaudot, first awarded 23 years later. They have become such big media events that the announcement of the winners is the lead item on the main lunchtime TV bulletins.

This should be good news for anyone who loves literature. Yet every year we hear the same old accusations — that the panels, whose members are co-opted for life, are not independent, that the prizes are rigged, that publishers collude to divide up the spoils. Three of them, Gallimard, Grasset and Seuil, pick up prizes so regularly that they are often sarcastically referred to as "Galligrasseuil".

Thus, we are told, the whole operation is planned down to the last detail; prizewinners, who can count themselves lucky to be around at the right time (when it suits their publishers' interests), take the money and run — and sometimes even vanish for ever, "killed off" by their sudden fame. On no account must they get it into their heads that it is their book or their talent that is being rewarded.

Of course, if the scenario were as blatant as that, the prizes would have been swept away by an avalanche of ridicule and scorn long ago. The events survive thanks to symbolic, political and financial interests whose parameters change from time to time.

This was amply illustrated in 1995, when the usual pattern was disrupted. Everyone thought Grasset, which has won the Goncourt virtually every other year, had a surefire winner in Franz-Olivier Gieshert's novel La Souille. But the judges preferred Andreï Makine's Le Testament Français (Mercure de France) which a week earlier had won the Prix Médicis, jointly with another novel.

No writer had ever before managed to net two of the leading literary awards in the same year. France was used to publishers battling it out at prizegiving time; but on this occasion it looked as though there had also been skirmishing between panels. The Goncourt judges were proud of their choice. "It proves that it's the book that counts," said Didier Decoin, a new judge. He would not have felt the need to voice that sentiment had there not been doubts about the way winners were chosen.

Who is to blame? The judges? Or the whole system — which could exist only in a country where everyone, including people such as former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, insists on trying their hand at novel-writing?

In France, book prizes have a particularly important symbolic and economic impact. People buy the prizewinning books, and especially the Goncourt, without realising that the judges' choices often have only a remote connection with literary quality.

Any panel can get it wrong — neither Proust, nor Joyce, nor Borges ever won the Nobel Prize for Literature — and it is easy to point to the large number of Goncourt winners who have vanished without trace, or to the many major writers who have been passed over.

But the infighting that used to be characteristic of France's close relationship with its writers of fiction now no longer seems to play a key role in the scramble to win prizes.

Recession has made the system even more perverse: in order to survive, certain publishers now need to win a top prize — especially the Goncourt — at regular intervals. This is why, in the struggle among the three rivals-cum-accomplices of "Galligrasseuil", the gloves have now come off.

What is a big prize worth to the leading publishers? Antoine Gallimard, chairman of Gallimard, and Claude Cherki, head of Seuil, are relaxed about it all. "For us it's the icing on the cake," says Gallimard. "In the old days, we used to say to ourselves that a prize would generate profit in years when we only managed to break even. Now I try to generate profit come what may."

But the Goncourt is a gift from heaven for a small publisher such as Mercure de France (a subsidiary of Gallimard), which makes an annual loss of up to 4 million francs (£500,000). "Makine's book will boost the group's financial position by helping to offset Mercure de France's losses," says Gallimard.

Gallimard's and Cherki's apparent lack of interest in the book prizes may seem odd. But income from a Goncourt, while it may double the turnover of a small publisher, represents only a small increase in sales for Gallimard and Seuil, which can draw on a much larger backlist, have paperback imprints, and cover a wide number of subjects.

SALES of a Goncourt prizewinner usually range from 150,000 to 400,000 copies (Marguerite Duras's L'Amant sold 1 million in 1984). A Goncourt that sells 300,000 copies at 100 francs per unit accounts for only 3 per cent of Gallimard's sales and 5 per cent of Seuil's.

The chief gain of the book prizes for those two publishers is that they help them to attract or hang on to writers who want to win a major literary award. "What people remember", says Cherki, "is not our autumn books list, but the fact we did or did not get a prize. The trouble is that even if we can do without the prizes from a financial standpoint they are vital to our image."

However, in the case of Grasset, most of whose output consists of new fiction, several Goncourt-less years in a row constitute a serious financial setback, even if it does enjoy the backing of a major publishing group like Hachette. A 300,000-copy Goncourt-winner represents 11 per cent of Grasset's turnover.

"You have to remember there are 150 bestsellers each year and only five major book prizes," says Jean-Claude Fasquelle, Grasset's chairman. "And even then only three of them really boost sales. Garcia Marquez and Umberto Eco don't need them. What irritates me is when external factors that have nothing to do with the quality of the book in question come into play — such as panels of judges settling scores with each other."

Does that mean external factors are more reprehensible than less visible but more complex internal ones, such as secret deals between rival publishers? These are only the tip of an iceberg that involves subsidiaries and publishers who are distributed by the big groups. Thus, any prizes that go to Editions de Minuit, Editions de l'Olivier or Phébus are of direct interest to Seuil, which distributes their books.

Even people working for the publishing houses which fight tooth and nail for the big prizes are now beginning to mutter that it is high time to change the present hidebound and discredited system of life-member panels. But just as long as the prizes interest the reading public and make money for publishers, there will be little incentive to make changes.

(November 22)



Not so glittering prizes

HOW DO the judges on the Prix Goncourt panel always manage to come up with a "surprise", and thus evade the brickbats they would undoubtedly earn if the rumours during the run-up to each year's award turned out to be correct, *writes Josayane Savigneau*.

Look at what happened in 1984. Bernard-Henri Lévy had just published his first novel, Le Diable en Tête (Grasset). The Goncourt judges are always reluctant to give their prize to a first novel, out of fear that the winner may write nothing afterwards. But Grasset was dead set on netting the prize, as indeed was Lévy. The whole thing seemed to be in the bag, and other publishers were already beginning to think about the following year's award.

But in the end the Goncourt went to Marguerite Duras for L'Amant — in other words to an established writer and a squeaky-clean publisher, Jérôme Lindon of Editions de Minuit.

In 1990 a leading journalist, Philippe Labro, hoped to win the Goncourt. Labro, an already successful Gallimard author, would have made an ideal Goncourt winner in the popular vein, and sales would probably have been correspondingly high. Also to be taken into consideration was the fact that Gallimard had not received the prize since 1985 and that Grasset had won it in 1986 and 1989.

But Labro also happened to be the influential head of a leading radio station, RTL. That made it difficult to award him the prize. In the end it went — unusually — to a first novel, Jean Rouard's Les Champs d'Honneur, published by Lindon.

In 1995 Grasset, which had won the Goncourt in 1991 and 1993, but not in 1994, was reportedly determined to see off the opposition. Two writers in its stable, François-Olivier Rousseau and Hector Bianciotti, were in the running. But Franz-Olivier Giesbert, another Grasset author, and editor of the daily newspaper Le Figaro, was also a contender with his third novel, La Souille. He soon became favourite to win.

But how could the judges award the prize to Giesbert when Labro, another journalist, had been debarred five years earlier? They could easily imagine the sarcastic comment such a decision would trigger, and therefore decided to give the prize to Andreï Makine's Le Testament Français.

The Bond bombshell

Jacques Buob

THE French defence ministry thought it would get lashings of free publicity for its military technology when it allowed the ultra-modern frigate, La Fayette, and the Tigre model of attack helicopter to feature in the latest James Bond movie, Goldeneye.

But it had not reckoned with Pierce Brosnan, the elegant successor, as James Bond, to the unrivalled Sean Connery, the charmer Roger Moore, the zombie-like George Lazenby and the discreet Timothy Dalton. Brosnan, it turns out, is fiercely antinuclear and a Greenpeace supporter.

In the course of promoting Goldeneye, the Irish-born actor has made no bones about his hostility to President Jacques Chirac's resumption of nuclear testing.

A surprised French government decided to cancel the long-planned gala preview of the film, at which defence minister Charles Millon and his top military brass would have been able to coo over the screen performance of France's own "stealth" frigate and "supercopter".

The fear was that anti-French remarks by Brosnan might have forced the minister to stalk out of the cinema. It turned out to be an unnecessary precaution, as the actor had decided to boycott the event anyway.

The quietly-spoken Brosnan explained his point of view to Le Monde in his suite at the Hôtel Plaza Athénée in Paris, in the presence of two enraptured young women, who also happened to be Greenpeace activists. They were clearly delighted to have pulled off this unexpected media coup at a time when Greenpeace's campaign seems to be running out of steam.

"No one is going to convince me that nuclear weapons are good for peace," Brosnan opined. "I've been out there and listened to what the Polynesians have to say, to their grievances. It's impossible to believe that the blasts will have no effect on the environment, wildlife and human beings."

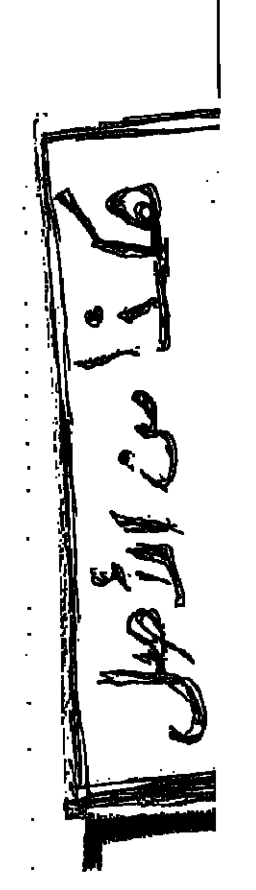
The French military authorities have been particularly surprised by Brosnan's remarks since he seemed to get on like a house on fire with the experts they sent out as advisers during shooting.

But the shoot took place last February, when, as they put it, "the context was different". They ascribe Brosnan's change of heart to his relationship with "a Greenpeace activist who has twisted him round her little finger". The actor angrily denies this, and describes her as a "journalist who specialises in environmental matters".

On December 1, Brosnan went to have a heart-to-heart talk with ministry of defence officials, who plied him with facts and figures in an attempt to convince him that the French nuclear tests in the Pacific were harmless. But when he emerged from the meeting, he was still sceptical.

(December 3/4)

Le Monde
Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani



China Dissident Gets Harsh Jail Sentence

Steven Mufson in Beijing

THE conviction and imprisonment of leading Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng last week on charges of "plotting to overthrow the government" drew widespread condemnation and further complicated China's problem-plagued relationship with the United States.

The Beijing Intermediate Court sentenced Wei to 14 years in jail — the harshest punishment imposed on a Chinese dissident since the Tiananmen Square democracy demonstrations of 1989.

Wei, 46, is widely regarded as the father of China's democracy movement and was a strong contender for this year's Nobel Peace Prize. A former soldier and Beijing zoo electrician, he was thrust to prominence by essays he wrote during the 1978-79 dissident poster campaign known as the Democracy Wall movement; since then, he has spent all but seven months in jail.

The stiff sentence handed down — apparently with the approval of China's top leadership — was yet another setback for U.S.-China relations after a summer of tension heightened by the unofficial visit of Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to the United States and by the Beijing government's subsequent arrest of Chinese American human rights activist Harry Wu. Wu was convicted on spying charges but later expelled from the country, and the two countries pledged in October to try to restore amicable relations.

Wei's imprisonment is the latest in several months of repressive actions aimed at critics of China's ruling Communist Party. All but three of nine signatories of a "peace charter" composed and disseminated by Chinese democracy advocates in 1993 are in jail or exile. Two leading figures from the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy movement who were released from prison a year ago — social scientist Chen Ziming and student leader Wang Dan — are back in jail. Chen's medical parole was revoked, and Wang has been in custody without trial or formal charge since May. Other critics of the regime live under virtual house arrest.

Police on guard at the Beijing court as Wei Jinsheng was sentenced last week. Foreigners were kept out of the 'open trial'
PHOTOGRAPH: GREG BAKER

At the same time, the Beijing government has adopted an aggressive stance on other political fronts, threatening to invade Taiwan; bullying Hong Kong's local government and press; and installing its hand-picked Panchen Lama, the second-ranking figure in Tibetan Buddhism, in an apparent bid to subvert the traditional authority of Tibet's exiled leader, the Dalai Lama.

In the Wei case, China brushed aside appeals for his release from numerous world leaders including President Clinton and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Nevertheless, many international human rights groups have accused Western governments of failing to speak out strongly enough on behalf of Chinese dissidents, thus allowing the Beijing leadership to believe that it stands to lose little by suppressing its critics.

Although a court spokesman said that Wei's trial would be open to the public, only his younger brother, Wei Xiaotao, and a younger sister were allowed to attend, while dozens of policemen prevented uninvited persons from approaching the courthouse. "Go," a police official said in English as he waved off one reporter. "Go far away."

Inside, his brother said, Wei sat with two of his lawyers, whom he had not been able to consult in advance, while three prosecutors presented the case to a panel of three judges. It was the first time family members had seen Wei since he was arrested on April 1 of last year.

Although Wei appeared to be healthy, he said at one point that he wasn't feeling well, and the court recessed for a half-hour so he could rest in an adjacent room and take some medicine, Wei Xiaotao told reporters.

The government charged that Wei had sought to "develop a plan of action that included establishing an organization to raise funds to support democratic movement activities" — a plan that allegedly called for operating newspapers, organizing cultural activities and publishing material to "raise a storm powerful enough to shake up the present government."

Wei's crimes, prosecutors said, also included seeking financial aid overseas and publishing articles critical of the socialist system and Communist Party leaders.

Further, they said, he had "surreptitiously organized some people both at home and abroad to discuss the so-called struggle strategy and planned to unite various forces of illegal organizations to make preparations for overthrowing the government." In support of all this, they said, Wei had purchased a 12.5 percent interest in an urban credit cooperative in Beijing so he could set up a "democratic movement" bank.

Evidence presented included letters Wei had written from jail in the early 1990s to Chinese leaders, including one to senior patriarch Deng Xiaoping regarding Chinese rule in Tibet. Both letters were later published abroad.

In a 20-minute statement in his defense, Wei said that the "purpose of his actions was to bring forth democracy and make every level of the people more capable of enjoying their own democratic rights and to protect their own interests," his brother told reporters. He also quoted Wei as denying that he sought to overthrow the government.

S.E. Asia Leaders Declare Nuke-Free Zone

Keith B. Richburg in Hong Kong

THE 10 nations of Southeast Asia took a defiant, if largely symbolic, stand last week against their giant nuclear-armed neighbors and the United States, voting to declare their region a nuclear-free zone and asking the world's nuclear powers to honor the ban.

The treaty bans the "possession, manufacture and acquisition" of nuclear weapons in a wide stretch of territory from Burma in the north to Indonesia in the south.

None of the Southeast Asian countries is believed to have the capability of or interest in developing nuclear weapons. Twenty years after the fall of Saigon, Southeast Asia is a largely prosperous region at peace with itself and with little likelihood of armed conflict.

But the region is surrounded by nuclear powers. China carried out a nuclear test three months ago, U.S. intelligence sources say that India may be just days from conducting its first nuclear test in two decades, Pakistan has the capacity to build nuclear weapons, and North Korea is believed to be developing its own nuclear program.

The United States, with its nuclear-armed fleet, remains the principal military force in Asia, while France has drawn widespread international condemnation for carrying out nuclear tests in the South Pacific.

The move by the Southeast Asian leaders seemed to mark an important, symbolic show of independence in foreign policy after two decades of Cold War polarization between the region's communist and non-communist blocs.

The idea for a nuclear-free zone in the region is at least a dozen years old. But it has come to fruition now because of the changes that have occurred since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. The long-running conflict in Cambodia was resolved with the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops, and Hanoi this year was admitted as a full member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Last week's vote came at a summit meeting in Bangkok that brought together all the region's heads of state. They include the leaders of the seven ASEAN nations — the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Vietnam — and, for the first time, those of Laos, Burma and Cambodia, which are attending the meeting as observers.

Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet gave the rationale for the treaty vote. "Over the past 50 years, since the dropping of the nuclear bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear menace has always threatened mankind's existence," he said.

"It is our hope that the countries outside the region, especially the nuclear powers, will respect Southeast Asia's aspiration and commitment, to guarantee not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons."

Most nuclear nations were cautiously critical of the nuclear-free zone vote. The United States said the zone might threaten its bilateral security agreements with some of the Asian countries and might inhibit its ability to move its nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered warships through the region.

China, for its part, said the treaty might infringe on some of its sovereignty claims, particularly in the disputed Spratly Island chain that is claimed by Beijing and four Southeast Asian nations.

Arafat to Run For President

Barton Gellman in Jerusalem

THREE DAYS after Israeli forces pulled out of Nablus, Yasser Arafat paid his first visit in 28 years to the West Bank's largest city last week and declared his candidacy for Palestinian president from the rooftop of an abandoned military post.

Shouting into a microphone atop the former Israeli headquarters, Arafat recited the litany of six Arab cities to receive self-rule by month's end — Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus already and Qalqilya, Ramallah and Bethlehem in coming days — and promised that "liberation" was coming for Jerusalem too.

"We promise to continue, step by step, building the Palestinian independent state with its capital, noble Jerusalem," Arafat shouted above the cheers. Sovereignty over Arab-dominated East Jerusalem, which Israel seized from Jordan in 1967, is a Palestinian demand in ongoing talks with Israel.

Arafat has long made clear that he planned to run for president of the Palestinian Council to be formed on January 20. He chose Nablus, a hotbed of Palestinian nationalism known as the Mountain of Fire, to make his candidacy official.

"From liberated Nablus, I say to you: Will you permit me to nominate myself?" Arafat asked. Thousands of Palestinians roared a joyous approval and broke into rhythmic chants pledging "our blood, our soul" to Abu Ammar, as Arafat was known among Palestinians through years of bloodshed with Israel.

The sequence designed by Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in the accord they signed in Washington in September, could not be more favorable to Arafat at the polls. His election campaign coincides with scene after scene of celebration as Israeli forces pack up and withdraw from cities where they were regarded as despised occupiers.

No potential opponent reaches double digits in public-opinion polls, and Arafat's election is regarded as certain. The 83-seat council will have executive and legislative powers.

The longtime chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, who has ruled the Gaza Strip and Jericho for 17 months, expressed his solidarity with Palestinian prisoners still held in Israeli jails. He singled out, as he often does, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of the Islamic Resistance Movement known as Hamas.

Many Hamas leaders appear likely to take part, directly or indirectly, in the January ballot. One senior leader in Gaza, Emad Falouji, has announced his candidacy for the legislature and accepted a position from Arafat as director of his efforts at "national reconciliation."

Arafat and his entourage arrived in Nablus in a pair of Egyptian helicopters flown from Gaza with an Israeli air force escort. Always concerned about his safety, Arafat has tightened security since Rabin's assassination last month. Bodyguards pressed close around him throughout his speech.